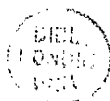


IMAGES AND METAPHOR: AN ANALYSIS OF
IBAN COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS

Julian Davison

Ph.D. in Social Anthropology
School of Oriental and African Studies
London 1987



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SYNOPSIS

The Iban of Sarawak, East Malaysia, are the inhabitants of a vast equatorial rain forest which not only plays a crucial role in satisfying their material needs, but also provides them with a rich source of imagery for the portrayal of key cultural concerns and social values. That is to say, one finds that Iban collective representations are characterized by a profusion of floral and botanical forms, while the ritual use of plants features strongly in Iban religious life. Often these 'sacred' and 'profane' aspects of the plant world coincide, as in the case of Iban rice farming which both provides them with their staple diet, and at the same time is imbued with a deeply religious significance.

The primary interest of this study, then, lies in its examination of the special relationship between man and plant in Iban culture. The research is based on library materials and takes, as its epistemological starting point, the idea that an understanding of metaphor can be usefully employed in the interpretation of symbolic phenomena. This approach works on two levels. On the one hand, there is the idea that a systematic examination of recurrent metaphorical forms - be they expressed in mythological narrative, ritual imagery, or everyday language - can be linked to dominant cultural values and social orientations. On the other hand, there is also the idea that a theory of metaphor - as developed in the field of literary criticism and semantics - can provide valuable insight into the way in which so-called 'symbolic phenomena' are 'actualized', or 'understood', by those for whom they operate.

In the last instance, the study seeks to transcend the formal strictures of conventional structural analysis by suggesting ways in which the elaborate structures that are revealed by the latter are actually realized, or at least represented, in daily life - whether it be in the rarefied atmosphere of a religious ceremony or the more mundane setting of some commonplace activity. In doing so, the study raises a number of issues that are of a metaphysical nature - among them the question of indigenous notions of causation - thereby providing not just simply a re-evaluation of the existing ethnographic record, but also a point of departure for future inquiries in the field.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Iban of Sarawak, East Malaysia, are the inhabitants of a vast equatorial rain forest which, despite the onslaught of large-scale logging operations in recent years, still covers by far the greatest part of the Bornean landscape. From the montagne jungles of the upland regions, to the mangrove swamps of the coastal areas, the Iban are surrounded by a world of profuse and luxuriant vegetation in which a myriad of plant species flourish, and which is forever engaged in an unbroken cycle of growth, fructuation, decay and regeneration. This forest habitat provides the Iban with an important source of food, raw materials, and produce for trade. At the same time, the climatic and environmental factors that support this proliferation of plant life also allow the Iban to cultivate an annual crop of hill rice, by means of a slash-and-burn system of shifting agriculture. This latter activity is of the utmost importance to the Iban, supplying them not only with their staple diet, but also with the economic wherewithal for the pursuit of various material and social ends. In short,

the Iban way of life, like that of many South East Asian peoples, has traditionally rested upon a deep and extensive knowledge of their rain forest environment and the local ecological factors that act upon the healthy growth and proliferation of plants.

Given the evident importance of the natural world in Iban daily life, it is perhaps not surprising to find that for the Iban, many plants possess not only a practical or economic significance, but are also "attributed sacred properties, or function as ritual objects, [while] floral imagery, symbolizing spiritual powers and relationships, permeates every facet of Iban ritual life" (Sather 1978a: 98). It is precisely this aspect of Iban society and culture which concerns us in this present study of Iban collective representations. That is to say, the intention here is to delve into the richness of this organic imagery and to explore the way in which the world of plants has furnished the Iban with a vivid and cohesive set of images and categories for the expression of key concerns and social values. In doing so, however, certain theoretical issues are raised that not only question our existing ideas about Iban society and culture, but at the same time call for a more general reconsideration of the anthropologist's traditional approach to the ethnography of the Malay and Indonesian archipelago. In this last respect, the present study goes some way beyond a simple re-evaluation of the Iban material in that it ultimately leads us to reflect upon the way in which theoretical presuppositions, and a commitment to western notions of rationality and science, may lead to a serious distortion, or mis-representation, of another culture's understanding of the way things are in the world.

The anthropological importance of the Iban, the contribution that this study makes, and the issues that are involved:

As King has noted (1978:6), the Iban over the years have come to occupy a prominent position in the ethnography of Borneo in that they are regularly taken as a "base line" for the comparative study of other tribes and peoples that are indigenous to the region. That this is so is due to a large extent to the quality of the literary source materials. These range from the earliest accounts of Archdeacon Perham and the Reverend Howell in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the most recent field studies of Sather, Uchibori, Sutlive and others. Important contributions have also included the native exegeses of Nyuak and Sandin. Above all, however, the Iban are best known to the anthropologist through the work of J.D. Freeman, most notably, via his classic monograph Report on the Iban (1955/1970), which sets out the principal features of Iban social organization and describes the special importance of rice farming both as an economic and a ritual activity.

The extent and quality of these sources enables us to build up what must be regarded as a fairly detailed, and, one assumes, comprehensive picture of many different areas and aspects of Iban society and culture, as it has existed over the last 150 years or so. This wealth of ethnographic material has never been fully exploited by Iban scholars in the past; nor has it ever been properly drawn together and examined as a 'single' body of work. As far as the present study is concerned, however, the sheer complexity and pervasiveness of plant imagery in Iban collective representations calls out for a holistic approach to the ethnography. In this respect, then, one finds that while the central interest of this

library research lies ostensibly in the Iban appropriation of plant life as a source of representational images and categories, one is at the same time ineluctably drawn into a reconsideration of Iban society and culture in more general terms.

This brings us immediately to our first problem - namely the question of what we mean by Iban society in the first place. The difficulties are two-fold. On the one hand, there is a temporal element to be considered in that the ethnographic literature stretches across more than one hundred years of radical social change during which time Iban society has altered greatly through increasing contact with the wider world and the imposition of colonial rule. On the other hand, one must also appreciate the fact that the wide ranging source materials that go to make up this extensive body of literature may each, in their own way, be constrained or influenced by various prejudices or preconceptions on the part of their respective authors - witness, for example, the early missionary interest in the possible evidence of an indigenous monotheism of sorts (eg: Perham 1881), or the theoretical assumptions of more recent investigators (see below). The combination of these two factors effectively denies the possibility of locating a 'traditional' Iban society as such. Instead we are left with various reflections or transformations of Iban society as it has evolved over time and as seen from a number of perspectives or different points of view.

The heterogeneity of this material, however, need not necessarily be thought of as an insurmountable problem. Indeed the elusive nature of 'traditional' Iban society is itself an argument in favour of the present study's approach to the material, wherein attention is focused not on Iban society as such, but rather on Iban collective representations, seen here as

a discrete field of inquiry. By this I mean that for the purposes of this analysis, it is intended to treat Iban collective representations as a kind of 'text', or a form of discourse, which fulfills its own truth conditions and rules of coherence. This text can be examined in its own terms without making appeal to a wider reality, just as the literary critic might discuss a novel without having to question the 'truth' of its narrative. Obviously, it is likely that there will be a certain, even close, correspondence between the imagery of Iban oral literature and ritual symbolism on the one hand, and the structure and fabric of Iban society on the other. Such a correspondence should not, however, be seen as indicating a necessary, or causal, connection between the organization of society and the collective representations of its members, in the manner that Durkheim and Mauss envisaged (1903).

Put simply, then, the interest of the present study lies primarily in its examination of what might be termed the 'internal logic' of Iban collective representations. In this respect, it is suggested, we are able to avoid the pitfalls associated with any absolute claims as regards the 'true' nature of Iban society - be it 'traditional' or otherwise - while still being in a position to gain novel and interesting insights into dominant cultural themes, concerns and orientations. That is to say, the idea here is that recurrent images, or redundant forms of expression, may be linked systematically to underlying social interests, or areas of cultural importance or anxiety. I shall elaborate upon this thesis shortly, but the principal point that I wish to make at this moment is that in adopting this approach to the material, the present study may be seen as providing a useful and valid contribution to the Iban ethnography and South East Asian

studies generally, while at the same time remaining strictly within the limitations that are inevitably imposed by library research.

Before I proceed further, it must at once be pointed out that Jensen's monograph, The Iban and their Religion (1974), sets out to cover much of the same ground in that it is described as "the first comprehensive attempt to set Iban society and their traditional economy based on shifting hill rice agriculture in the context of their belief in spirits which informs all aspects of their lives in the Sarawak interior" (1974: sleeve notes). One finds, however, that what Jensen is really concerned with is "the situation, principally in the Second Division¹ of Sarawak, as it was during the years 1959 to 1966" (1974:6). This contemporary setting, combined with the author's general disregard for the ethnographic literature as a source of supplementary information to field data (Freeman 1975: 282), has meant that this particular study leaves a lot to be desired if it really is to be regarded as a "comprehensive" account of Iban religious life.

These shortcomings are particularly evident in a number of major omissions in Jensen's description of Iban religious practices (Freeman 1975: 276-281). Perhaps the most serious of these is his failure to discuss warfare as a ritual activity. As we shall presently see, headhunting played an important role in Iban religious ideology and still is of the greatest significance, ritually, to this day. The contemporary setting of Jensen's study, however has led him to avoid the subject of Iban warfare altogether, despite the fact that much of the fabric of headhunting as a social and ritual institution remains intact in many Iban areas (Freeman 1975: 277-78, 284-5, 288; 1979). In this respect one finds that an extremely important area of Iban religious life has been glossed over by Jensen², and Freeman

has indicated that there may be a number of other gaps, or oversights, in Jensen's material (Freeman 1975: 278-81).

These omissions may be largely accounted for by the contemporary setting of Jensen's study and the particular circumstances that existed in the region where his field-work was located. Thus, as Freeman has pointed out, while Jensen may well have described "the religious beliefs and practices of the Lemanak very much as he found them to be ...[he provides] ... an insufficient indication of the extent to which these practices are vestiges of a once very much richer religious complex" (1975: 276). In this respect then, Jensen's monograph falls some way short of its more general aims which, we are informed, are "to provide an ethnographical account of Iban behaviour, the religious beliefs which are the basis for their way of life, the framework within which these exist, and the ends to which they are directed" (Jensen 1974: 5).

Ethnographic shortcomings aside, one finds, too, that at an analytical level, there is very little direct evidence in the existing literary record to support Jensen's dualistic portrayal of Iban thought and ideology, despite the fact that such a view agrees favourably with prevailing scholarly opinion on the nature of South East Asian society and culture. That is to say, there is an underlying assumption throughout Jensen's monograph that Iban thought and religion - in keeping with that of other Malaysian and Indonesian peoples - is fundamentally dualistic in character, being based on a binary vision of the world. For example, Jensen refers to the "balanced" nature of Iban thought (1974: 109), which he sees as linked to a notion of universal order (1974: 211). In doing so, he constructs a table of "complementary associated properties" which include the following set of paired categories: (living) men/spirits and the dead; body/soul;

mortal/immortal; visible/invisible; substantial/insubstantial; the ordinary and profane/sacred; earth/sky; man/woman; right/left; and so on and so forth (Jensen 1974: 110-111). These pairs of terms, or attributes, we are told, are regarded as "opposite and complementary facets of existence as the Iban see it ... in which both aspects are of comparable value" (Jensen 1974: 109).

This kind of analysis is typical of any number of South East Asian studies and has its origins in a theoretical tradition that stretches back to the early decades of this century. I refer here to the Leiden school of anthropology, whose ethnographic inquiries during the colonial period of the Dutch East Indies gave rise to the idea of an inherent regional dualism whereby much of Malay and Indonesian society was seen to be explicable in terms of a series of cosmological and conceptual dichotomies³. This theoretical position has become something of an orthodoxy among South East Asian scholars (eg: Barnes 1982), and in recent years its arguments have been transmitted to a wider audience via a number of studies and translations of Dutch works that have emanated from Oxford⁴ under the auspices of Professor Rodney Needham⁵ - Jensen's monograph being one such example (below).

To over-simplify, those at Oxford have sought to integrate the ethnographic findings of their Dutch predecessors, with the tenets of modern structural analysis. Thus one of its practitioners describes this Oxonian branch of structuralism as a "modest attempt to discern patterns, themes and logical principles in the complex social facts characteristic of human communities" (Hicks 1978: 13). This is achieved by reducing these "complex social facts" to a "system of order" wherein "indigenous social and symbolic categories are interpreted according to the three logical principles of opposition, complementarity and homology (or analogical

association)" (Hicks 1978: 13). In doing so, it is frequently found - at least in as far as the ethnography of the Malay and Indonesian archipelago is concerned - that "in most instances the complementary oppositions thus defined cohere in an abstract schema which corresponds to the form of a binary matrix" (Hicks 1978: 13).

It will be evident that this is precisely the approach adopted by Jensen in his treatment of the Iban material viz. his construction of a table of "complementary associated properties" (above). One should of course note in this connection that Jensen was himself a student at Oxford and that his doctoral dissertation was in fact supervised by Needham himself. Clearly Jensen has chosen to follow in the footsteps of his colleagues and mentors and set himself the task of demonstrating that Iban society and culture is also underwritten by a dualistic or binary principle (see Freeman 1975: 283, 286-287)⁶. His success in this venture, however, is by no means assured.

To begin with, one finds that many of the pairs of "complementary associated properties" that feature in Jensen's table consist of terms that are logically related to one another in such a way that they are both implicit in a single concept. That is to say the conception of one - for example, invisibility - automatically implies the conception of the other. To be told, therefore, that the Iban distinguish between man and woman, right and left, mortality and immortality, the substantial and the insubstantial, is not particularly startling news as far as Iban thought is concerned. Furthermore, one should note that while in some instances it may indeed be possible to arrange certain domains or elements in a dyadic manner - for example, the earth and sky and the supernatural beings that inhabit these realms - this fact does not in itself reveal the presence of

an underlying system of binary classification as is implied by Jensen's view of a "balanced dualism in Iban thought ... based upon a complementary scheme in which both aspects are of comparable value" (1974: 109). Nor does it tell us very much about the actual categories that are involved - either in their own terms or else in terms of their supposed 'opposition' to one another.⁷

This brings us to a very important consideration -namely the very notion of opposition itself. By this I mean that the use of opposition as an analytical concept may be misleading in that it tends to oversimplify data, reducing any number of complex relationships to a single, uniform category. As Hobart observes:

"The difficulty is that structuralism tends to treat a wide range of logically distinct operations as synonymous. Under the blanket term 'opposition' it is possible to transform all sorts of differences into a comfortable system. No matter what is fed into the hat, the prestidigitator always pulls out rabbits with elegantly opposed ears" (1983: 398).

In other words, almost anything can be ultimately incorporated into a binary matrix, and in this light, the fact that so many South East Asian societies have tended to come out looking the same - irrespective of racial, geographical, historical or linguistic divides - suggests strongly that the proclivity for dualism and binary classification may lie not so much in the minds of the natives as in the scholastic traditions of those who have studied them.

The time is ripe then for us to re-consider our understanding of Iban society and culture and in this connection the extent and quality of the literary sources that are available makes this undertaking a very suitable project for a study based upon library research. At the same time, the position of Iban studies vis à vis the ethnography of other Bornean peoples, not to mention the implications of this re-appraisal of Indonesian dualism as a theoretical precept, imbues this research project with a far greater significance than simply that of bringing the Iban material up to date in terms of current anthropological perspectives. That is to say, it ultimately leads us to question our existing assumptions about the nature of South East Asian society and culture at a more general level. In this respect, then, this re-examination of Iban collective representations makes a two-fold contribution to anthropology: as an ethnographic analysis on the one hand, and as part of a continuing theoretical debate on the other.

Methodological approach

A serious criticism of the structuralist approach in anthropology has been its failure to explain how the elaborate structures that it reveals - together with their various isomorphic transformations - are actually experienced, or 'understood', within the cultures from which they are drawn (Crocker 1977: 50). To take an example, Lévi-Strauss, in his structural analysis of myth, breaks down the mythological narrative into what he calls its "gross constituent units" (1979a: 211). These units, or "mythemes", are related to each other, either in opposition, or else as inversions or transformations of one another, and in this light the text of a myth can be

regarded as comprising of several "bundles of relations" (Lévi-Strauss 1979a: 211). Lévi-Strauss argues that it is "only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning" (Lévi-Strauss 1979a: 211). Ricoeur points out, however, that what Lévi-Strauss refers to as "meaning" in this context, "is not at all what the myth means, in the sense of its philosophical or existential content or intuition, but rather the arrangement or disposition of the mythemes themselves; in short the structure of the myth" (1976: 83).

This, in itself, is not especially informative, for as Sperber has remarked:

"a system of homologies, oppositions and inversions is, in itself, mysterious enough. It is hard to see in what sense it explains or interprets symbolic phenomena. It organizes them." (1979: 68)^e

This shortcoming has given rise to the criticism that structuralism is simply a heuristic device (Sperber 1979: 67) in that although it may arrange the material in a coherent order - at least as far as the analyst and his public are concerned - there still remains the question of "what is the role, the nature of this organization?" (Sperber 1979: 68). In order to answer this question, it is necessary, I suggest, to go beyond the formal arrangement of the elements that occur, for example, in the text of a myth, or in the procedures of a ritual performance, and to examine more thoroughly the actual images themselves which are so systematically ordered. In short, the time has come to shift the focus of attention from structure to content, from syntax to meaning itself.

This position should not be seen as a denial of the value of structural analysis as such; rather it should be understood as a call for a change of emphasis in the way we approach the study of symbolic phenomena. In this instance, we are not so much concerned with the question of 'how do symbols work or acquire their meaning?' - in the sense that they are related to one another in an integrated system of symbols - as we are with understanding *what* symbols mean (Sperber 1979: 51-2).

I take as my starting point the idea that there is an affinity between the use of symbols in a ritual context and the role of metaphor in language. Both phenomena rely upon an 'extension of meaning' from the primary, or literal, signification of a term or image as it occurs in everyday experience or language, to a secondary or metaphorical signification, as engendered by its use in a symbolic or figurative context. In this respect, one can argue that symbolic associations can, for the purposes of analysis, be read as metaphorical statements about the nature of things and the relationships between them at a mystical level of explanation.

The potential significance of this approach for the anthropologist is succinctly put by Rosaldo & Atkinson when they argue that:

"A systematic study of ... essentially redundant metaphorical expressions can isolate the principles in terms of which they are selected, the particular ideas of order, the emotional orientations and cultural themes which they are intended to express. Such ideas, in turn, can be systematically related. From an analysis of actual metaphors one can begin to isolate the structural associations which underlie a multiplicity of cultural expressions. Each metaphor, taken by itself, may seem arbitrary, yet combined with others it can be shown to signify and reflect an underlying system of meanings, and to serve as a vehicle through which that system is constituted and reaffirmed" (1975: 45).

Evidently, the idea is not to do away with 'structure' altogether, but in this instance, the emphasis is placed upon the symbols themselves — i.e. their content, read as metaphorical statements about the nature of things — rather than their arrangement in a particular sequence, as, for example, in a mythological narrative. In this respect, the 'structure' that is sought is less susceptible to the imposition of an external order arising from the theoretical proclivities of the analyst and his scholastic tradition.

Organisation of the thesis

As far as the organization and layout of this thesis is concerned, the following chapter is devoted to a more detailed discussion of the epistemological framework outlined above. This includes a brief critique of the concept of symbolism as an analytical category, and a discussion of various ways of avoiding the confusion that so frequently attends the use of this term. Particular importance is attached to the usefulness of metaphor theory in this respect, and the implications that this may have in relation to structuralist interpretations of symbolic phenomena.

The third chapter provides an ethnographic and historical introduction to the Iban people and their way of life, and serves as a prelude to the analysis itself which commences in chapter four. This opens with some general observations as regards the appropriation of plant images in Iban collective representations, but is primarily concerned with Iban theories of sickness and disease, and the notion that each individual possesses a mystical counterpart, that takes the form of a plant. The

sociological implications of these ideas are followed up in chapter five, which examines the position of the individual vis à vis his family and the rest of society, and many of the same themes emerge in chapter six, which considers the economic, political, and religious significance of Iban farming.

Chapter seven also concerns rice - in this instance the relationship between women cultivators and their crops - while chapter eight examines the connection between Iban notions of fertility - both human and agricultural - and the special significance of headhunting as a ritual activity. These latter chapters raise interesting questions as regards Iban notions of causation and the ideas that are involved here can ultimately be set against a cosmological background which forms the substance of chapter nine.

It will be evident, even from this brief outline, that the thesis covers a lot of ground and touches upon a wide range of topics. These different areas of Iban social and cultural life are all drawn together by the fact that they are commonly portrayed in Iban collective representations through the imagery of plant and organic metaphors, which, as I have already indicated (p.5), constitute the principal point of departure for this re-examination of the Iban ethnography. This is not to suggest that floral and botanical metaphors are the *only* form of imagery to appear in Iban discourse - it is doubtful that any society would be so mono-maniacal as to adopt a single mode or idiom of cultural expression. Nevertheless, recourse to the world of plants as a source of representational categories clearly predominates in Iban oral literature, ritual imagery, and language generally, and it is this particular aspect of Iban society and culture that I wish to concentrate upon here.

At the same time, the various chapters of this thesis are also sequentially linked in that the issues and topics that are raised in one chapter tend to lead in to those that appear in the next. Thus the question of personal health and well-being raised in chapter four, introduces us to a discussion of the family unit in chapter five, which in turn leads us to an examination of the social and ritual significance of rice farming in chapter six. and so on. This interconnectedness is of course perfectly understandable, for society and culture cannot be ultimately broken up into compartments, or separated out into isolated events, but instead form a seamless whole. It is this view, then, which prompts me in part to treat Iban collective representations, for the purposes of the present analysis, as a kind of 'text' or 'commentary', whose images and metaphors may be resorted to time and time again - be it in standard or ritualized contexts, or else in entirely novel situations - but which collectively can be put together and 'read' as an ever-unfolding account of the circumstance of Iban social life and their experience of the world.

NOTES

1. Sarawak is divided into seven major administrative divisions, each with its own health, educational, police, and other divisional headquarters.
2. Jensen, in his introduction, writes that "[h]eadhunting is mentioned only in passing ... [for]... [s]ince its successful suppression in the 1920s, headhunting has not played an active role in Iban behaviour" (1974: 6). Freeman, however, replies that while "[t]his statement may well be true for the Lemanak Iban among whom Dr Jensen lived, [it] most decidedly does not hold true for the Iban of some other parts of Sarawak" (1975: 277). He adds that:

"At the beginning of 1949 when I arrived in the Kapit District there were Japanese and other recently-taken heads hanging with the trophies of former years in numerous long-houses, and, throughout the region, the great *gawai* [festivals] associated with the cult of head-hunting were being performed in all their archaic splendour" (Freeman 1975: 277).
3. See, for example, Van Ossenbruggen 1918; Rassers 1922; J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong 1935; Van Wouden 1935; Van der Kroef 1954; Downs 1955; P.B. de Josselin de Jong 1975; 1977.
4. See for example Needham 1962; 1963; 1968; 1973; 1974; 1980: 41-62; Cunningham 1964; Fox 1973; Barnes 1974; 1982; Hicks 1976; 1978.
5. One should note that Needham was himself a student at Leiden (Needham 1971: lxvii).
6. It is interesting to consider here the possible influence of the Swiss scholar Hans Schärer's study of Ngaju religion (1946) which is

considered, quite rightly, as a classic monograph in the tradition of the Leiden school. The Ngaju are another Bornean people (south to central Kalimantan), whose way of life resembles, superficially at any rate, that of the Iban (ie, in terms of swidden rice cultivation; headhunting; longhouse residence and so forth). In his account of Ngaju religious ideology - which incidently was translated from German into English by Needham (1963) - Schärer describes the Ngaju universe, both physical and social, as being divided between the two major categories of the Upperworld and the Lowerworld, and their respective deities *Mahatala* and *Jata* (1963: 16ff). At the same time, however, this duality also forms a unity and we are told that this "unity of the duality is prominent in all religious ceremonies" (Schärer 1963: 18). Furthermore, this "duality dissolved in the unity" pervades the whole of Ngaju culture so that:

"The total divinity is Watersnake and Hornbill, Upperworld and Underworld, man and woman, sun and moon, sacred spear and sacred cloth, good and evil, life and death, war and peace, security and disaster, etc. The same ambivalence is found in the cosmos, which also forms a unity in duality: sun and moon, Upperworld and Underworld, west and east, upstream and downstream. It is also found in religious life: good spirits and evil spirits, life and death; and in social life: Hornbill people and Watersnake people ... The theme is also found, finally, in economic life: the division of labour and goods of the Upperworld and of the Underworld, which together comprise the wealth and property of mankind" (1963: 18-19)

This brief extract from Schärer's monograph provides an excellent example of a structural analysis in the Leiden tradition. More important, however, at least as far as our present interests are concerned, is the possible role of this work as a source of inspiration for Jensen's dualistic understanding of Iban cosmology and religious ideology. For example, Jensen refers to Schärer's study on a number of occasions (1974: 102n, 105n, 112, 113n), while his remark that in Iban thought "[t]here is no real dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, since these are two aspects of an integrated world-view" (1974: 211), clearly bears a close resemblance to Schärer's idea of a "duality dissolved in the unity" (above). Furthermore, in his table of "associated properties" (see p.10-11), Jensen includes the terms 'up-river' and 'down-river' (1974: 111), but whereas these spatial orientations are of fundamental importance in the Ngaju context, one finds that these directions are mentioned on just two other occasions in Jensen's entire monograph, and then only as asides (1974: 178, 190). In this last respect, one is left wondering why it is that Jensen bothers to include these categories in his table; unless of course he was encouraged to do so by the Ngaju material. In short, the suggestion is that superficial resemblances between Ngaju and Iban society may have prompted Jensen to seek more essential similitudes between the two cultures.

7. Hallpike, in a critical appraisal of Needham's own attempt to reduce Nyoro collective representations to a similar table of dyads, remarks that although a particular culture may be "permeated by symbolic opposition in which colour, number, certain animals, and left and right have a number of constant associations,...[these]... are insufficient in themselves to constitute a system of classification (especially since the classification involved here is based on indigenous associations, not on any taxonomic principles)" (1979: 232). He goes on to point out that in order for us to gain a proper insight into Nyoro symbolic categories,

"It is necessary for us to understand a vast range of facts about Nyoro life - kingship, female status, kinship, class stratification, divination, land tenure, the uses of animals such as cattle, sheep, and chickens, and so on. It is this implicit knowledge, the common property of the Nyoro people, that really gives meaning to the symbolic oppositions; the range of oppositions is itself parasitic upon the rest of Nyoro culture and depends upon a further range of ideas, both explicit and implicit, which have an essential function in providing conceptual order." (1979: 232-3)

8. c.f. my earlier remarks as regards the notion of opposition as an analytical concept p. 13).

CHAPTER II

EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The principal interest of this study lies in its examination of Iban symbolic discourse and ritual action. In this respect it belongs to the main stream of anthropological inquiry and in the past it would have perhaps required no further words of introduction than those above. Times have changed, however, and with them our perception of the field of inquiry - to describe this analysis simply as a contribution to symbolic anthropology is insufficient for we must first ask ourselves what it is we mean when we use the term symbolic. In other words, just what is it we are looking at.

The issue is neatly summarized by Barley when he observes that:

"The word 'symbolism' has come to be used in such a variety of senses that it no longer constitutes a well-defined category. It has been used as an etic category of the observer, an emic category used by the observed, a discrete class of behaviour, and an aspect of all behaviour. The simplest and most pervasive viewpoint in anthropology can be summed up as: 'This looks crazy. It must be symbolism'." (1983: 10).

He goes on to comment that although this "tradition is one sanctioned by generations of anthropological practice, [t]he decision to interpret behaviour as 'symbolic' is often the product of the failure of the anthropologist to comprehend something, plus a dogmatic commitment to the rationality of primitive man" (1983: 10).

The question of rationality and the criteria by which it may be judged are themselves problematic issues in that they may ultimately be derived from cultural assumptions and presuppositions about the nature of things. Evidently, this is a very sophisticated area of inquiry, and as one might imagine, the answers to these questions are not to be found in the existing Iban ethnographic literature. Furthermore, as Barley goes on to point out, it is in fact "very difficult to justify a distinction between 'rational' and 'irrational' areas of culture since both may rest upon the same basic structures that define reality - a world-view that few would wish to deny the appellation 'symbolic'" (1983: 11).

At this point we seem to have come round in a full circle, but the solution to our problems is at hand and lies in the very nature of our object of study - namely Iban collective representations. As I indicated earlier (p. 8), for the purposes of this analysis, Iban collective representations may be treated as an indigenous commentary, or set of discursive practices, on society, human experience, and the world in general. Much of the text of this commentary is couched in a vegetal or organic idiom, but nevertheless can be regarded as a cohesive set of statements - often highly figurative, in our eyes - about the nature of things and events. This position does not require any assumptions on the part of the analyst as regards the literal veracity of these representations for the Iban, for this native discourse can be examined as

a discrete entity in itself, without making excessive claims at an ontological or existential level. Nevertheless, the idea here is that in submitting the imagery of this text to a rigorous and systematic analysis, it is possible to discern certain underlying themes, or "structures", which perhaps rather than actually "defining reality", in a literal sense, then at least may be said to provide the Iban with a means of talking about, or dealing with, reality - howsoever it may be defined by them.

The important point to note here is that these cultural themes, or structures, are arrived at through the imagery of Iban oral literature and ritual activity, and can be examined in their own terms without having to designate them as either 'real' or 'symbolic'. Thus as far as our present purposes are concerned, it is sufficient simply to know that this is the way that the Iban have *chosen* to represent the world and their experience of it, without drawing any conclusions as regards the nature of Iban mental processes, or the attributes of a collective Iban mind.

The principal advantage of this approach lies in its use of the term 'representation'. Representation provides us with a precise and, for the present purposes, perfectly adequate description of the basic principle underlying the relationship, or set of relationships, that are typically included under the heading of 'symbolic'. By substituting the word 'represents' for 'symbolizes', we are able to avoid the epistemological problems that are associated with the use of the latter term without having to compromise ourselves in some other way. Nevertheless, the notion of representation can itself cause some confusion of its own if we are not quite certain what we mean by this term.

At its simplest, representation involves reference (Goodman 1976: 5). By representing A as B we are in effect *referring* to A by means of B. In

this respect, therefore, to represent is to *denote* (Goodman 1976: 5). As far as our present interests are concerned, however, our terms of reference are not simply abstract or arbitrary signs such as is the case with mathematical symbols or words (onomatopoeias excepted). Instead, they consist of a wide range of images that are drawn from the phenomenal world of sensory experiences - many of which, in the case of Iban collective representations, are of a botanical or organic nature. In this respect, we are therefore dealing with a special case of representation, namely 'representation-as' (Goodman 1976: 27 seq). That is to say we are dealing with the representation of one thing, A, *in terms of* another - Y, and it is precisely at this point that we run into the idea of metaphor for a metaphorical utterance can at its simplest be defined (quite literally) as the re-presentation of one thing as, or in terms of, another. With this thought in mind, then, I would like to turn to a discussion of metaphor as an analytical concept, and review its potential value to the anthropological study of so-called symbolic phenomena.

Metaphors, tropes and symbolic phenomena.

Recent years have seen the increasingly sophisticated use of a theory of metaphor and other tropes in the anthropological literature (eg: Tambiah 1968; Sapir & Crocker 1977; Parkin 1982). Just as an earlier generation turned towards structural linguistics as a source of theoretical inspiration, contemporary anthropologists have looked to the field of rhetoric and literary criticism to provide them with an epistemology, or set of analytical tools, for the study of collective representations. The present analysis can thus be seen as part of a more general theoretical

development. For this reason I have chosen, for the purposes of the present chapter, to retain the use of 'symbolic' as a general term for the description of the field of interest, despite the reservations expressed above. This is partly a stylistic convenience, but more importantly, it allows me to locate my arguments within the context of conventional anthropological debate which, as we have noted, traditionally draws a distinction between the real or commonplace, and the symbolic. It must be emphasized here, however, that this strategy should not in any way be seen as a revocation of my earlier remarks concerning the use of this term.

Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, defined four types of metaphor: genus substituted for species; species for genus; genus for genus; and analogy. Modern rhetoricians, however, would include the first two forms of substitution under the heading of synecdoche (Sapir 1977: 5), leaving us with genus for genus substitution and analogy. The important point to realize here, is that whereas in a synecdochic substitution the two terms involved fall within a single semantic domain so to speak - in that they are inherently, or 'naturally' related to one another (ie, as a part is to the whole, or a whole to its parts) - this is not the case in substitutions or equations that are of a metaphorical or analogical nature. In other words, metaphorical and analogical relationships both entail the bringing together of terms that are normally to be found in totally unrelated semantic domains (for example, 'man' and 'wolf' in the metaphorical utterance 'Man is a wolf'). In doing so, they initiate an extension, or exchange, of signification, or meaning, from one domain to the other (Ricoeur 1976: 50; see also below), and it is in this respect that a theory of metaphor and analogy may have a useful role to play in the anthropological study of symbolic phenomena.

Before proceeding further, it must at once be pointed out that in concentrating upon metaphor and analogy, one should not ignore the importance of synecdochic substitution in the construction of symbolic schema. Nor should one overlook the significance of metonymy in this respect - defined here as the substitution of one 'cause' (in the Aristotelian sense) for another: cause for effect, container for contained, instrument for agent, agent for act, and so forth (Sapir 1977: 19-20). For example, one might find that in a ritual context' the transference of certain attributes or qualities from one object to another may entail the treatment, or manipulation, of a part in place of the whole, as for instance in the sorcerer's use of his victim's hair or nail parings as a substitute for the victim himself. Alternatively, the use of language on such occasions may turn on a metonymic substitution, whereby the very naming of an object or attribute may in itself be regarded as fulfilling a similar function as for example in the casting of spells (Tambiah 1968). In other words, synecdoche and metonymy may play a vital role in underpinning the efficacy of symbolic or ritual transactions.

For the literary critic, both synecdoche and metonymy fall under the same general heading as metaphor and analogy in that they are all defined as tropes. Tropes are themselves defined as "figures of speech that operate on the meaning (the 'signified') rather than the form (the 'signifier'), of words ... [where] one meaning, or ... term, is related either by replacement, by implication, or by juxtaposition, to another" (Sapir 1977: 3). However, whereas synecdoche and metonymy are based upon contiguities (i.e. the two terms in both instances belong to the same semantic domain), metaphor and analogy turn upon the notion of resemblance. This distinction is important for the idea of resemblance raises questions of identity and

co-substantiality whose answers lie at the heart of any proper understanding of what we mean when we use the term 'symbolic' (Evans-Pritchard 1956; Firth 1966; Beidelman 1968; Hayley 1968; Milner 1969; Goulay 1972).

This is not to imbue resemblance with a primary significance, or to give it priority over other kinds of relationship in the formulation of symbolic associations. As Goodman points out, resemblance in itself is not a sufficient condition of representation:

"An object resembles itself to the maximum degree but rarely represents itself: resemblance, unlike representation, is reflexive. Again, unlike representation, resemblance is symmetric: B is as much like A as A is like B, but while a painting may represent the Duke of Wellington, the Duke doesn't represent the painting. Furthermore, in many cases neither one of a pair of very like objects represents the other: none of the automobiles off an assembly line is a picture of the rest; and a man is not normally a representation of another man, even his twin brother. Plainly, resemblance in any degree is no sufficient condition for representation." (1976:4)

Nor, for that matter, is resemblance even a necessary condition for representation - a crown represents the monarchy on the basis of a convention or contingency, not because there is a perceived resemblance between a crown and the institution or personage it denotes.

But if one should be warned against the dangers of opting for a single, or essentialist, view of symbolic representations it is nevertheless salutary to pursue the allied concepts of metaphor and analogy somewhat further. This is because there still remains an important distinction between synecdoche and metonymy on the one hand, and metaphor and analogy on the other: whereas it is relatively easy to perceive the principles that

underlie both synecdoche and metonymic substitution - the one based on a functional relationship between part and whole, the other on a contingency or conventional usage - in the case of metaphor or analogy we are dealing with a more complex set of relationships which involve an exchange of meaning, or signification, between two different realms or semantic domains. It is this last aspect of metaphor and analogy which is of particular interest to the student of symbolic phenomena and which argues for their special status vis à vis the other tropes.

At first glance it is sometimes difficult to see what it is, exactly, that distinguishes metaphor from analogy. The success of a metaphorical utterance depends upon the two substituted terms resembling each other on the basis of postulated shared attributes and this would appear to indicate that metaphor can itself be subsumed under the heading of analogy, which the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines as "similar in attributes, circumstances, relations or uses". The Greek definitions of analogy, as used in mathematics, however, provides a useful point of departure for distinguishing between the two terms, for in this instance analogy describes an equality of ratios and proportions. In other words, whereas metaphor is to do with a resemblance of attributes or qualities, analogy is to do with congruity of relations²

As far as anthropological theory is concerned, conventional structural analysis has focused the attention upon the analogical dimension of collective representations - i.e. their capacity to function as 'paradigmatic' codes for the organization of society and culture. That is to say that elements in a particular domain - for example, the realm of nature - are found to be related to each other either through 'opposition', or else as inversions or transformations of one another, and this formal

arrangement is then shown to be reflected in the institutions of society and culture.

This method of analysis is exemplified in Lévi-Strauss' discussion of totemic logic, where, it will be recalled, he argues that *"it is not the resemblances, but the differences, which resemble each other"* (1973: 149).

By this he means that:

".... on the one hand there are animals which differ from each other (in that they belong to distinct species, each of which has its own physical appearance and mode of life), and on the other hand there are men... who also differ from each other (in that they are distributed among different segments of the society, each occupying a particular position in the social structure). The resemblance presupposed by so-called totemic representations, is *between these two systems of differences*" (1973: 149-50; emphasis in text)

Presented in this way, the argument is apparently flawless, and, as Lévi-Strauss subsequently observes, the logical nature of this structure "would be fundamentally impaired if homologies between the terms themselves [i.e. between clan and totem] were added to those between their relations [i.e. the differences between natural species on the one hand, and social groups on the other], or if, going one step further, the entire system of homologies were transferred from relations to terms" (1976: 115; my parentheses). In making this remark Lévi-Strauss would appear to be denying the possibility of an intrinsic relationship between the signifier and signified based for example, on an idea of resemblance or shared identity. That is to say, the association between a clan and its totem is to be regarded as a purely analogical one arising from the fact that they occupy corresponding positions in two isomorphic series.

Lévi-Strauss is immediately forced to acknowledge that there are many instances where an explicit identification is made between the members of a clan and their totemic animal. For example, among the Chickasaw Indians of North America one finds that the "Raccoon people were said to live on fish and wild fruit, those of the Puma lived in the mountains, avoided water of which they were very frightened and lived principally on game. The Wild Cat clan slept in the daytime and hunted at night, for they had keen eyes ..." and so on and so forth (Lévi-Strauss 1976: 118)

According to Lévi-Strauss, this kind of phenomenon represents an emergent caste system, where the postulated heterogeneity of the social groups is based on a natural model of specific differentiation (ie, the animal species), rather than a cultural model of functional (occupational) differences as in the Indian caste system (1976: 121-125). In this respect Lévi-Strauss argues that despite certain discrepancies between a totemic model of social differentiation and that of castes,

"Inlevertheless it remains true that we can on a very general plane perceive an equivalence between the two main systems of differences to which men have had recourse for conceptualizing their social relations. Simplifying a great deal, it may be said that castes picture themselves as natural species while totemic groups picture natural species as castes" (1976: 127).

In both instances it is a 'system of differences' that is significant, rather than the nature of the species or occupations in themselves. In other words, for Lévi-Strauss it is always the system, or "structure", which predominates, not the components it incorporates.

The emphasis of structuralism on the abstract, systematic and analogical qualities of symbolic phenomena would seem to arise from an over-enthusiastic, or rigorous, application of the 'Saussurian' linguistic model in a context that may not be entirely appropriate. That is to say, the 'Saussurian' doctrine of an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified (onomatopoeias excepted), and, following on from this, the idea that the principal object of study should be, not so much the elements of a language or linguistic 'system' - be they phonemes, morphemes, or sememes - but rather the relationships between the whereby each element receives its value by virtue of its position in relation to other elements, would appear to have directed the attention of anthropologists towards the purely formal and systematic nature of symbolic phenomena - i.e. their structural properties. The question that arises here, however, is that while this primacy of structure may very well apply in the rather special case of a pure totemic structure (Lévi Strauss 1976: 115), is this necessarily true in the case of other forms of symbolic representation? The issue that is at stake here is one of motivation. Motivation has been defined as "a natural relationship between the signifier and the signified, a relationship which is in their nature, their substance, or their form" (Guiraud 1978: 25-26). As far as the anthropological literature is concerned, this aspect of symbolic representation is best exemplified in Turner's view of symbols as things that are "regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities [sic] or by association in fact or thought" (1967: 21). Clearly not all symbols need be motivated in this way - as for example in the case of algebraic symbols or, as we have just seen, in a Lévi-Straussian

understanding of totemic logic. On the other hand, it is equally evident that many symbolic relationships are indeed constructed on the grounds of a perceived affinity between the signifier and the signified.

This affinity may be explicit or it may be covert; it may be constructed upon the strength of readily observable qualities, or it may rest upon metaphysical presuppositions about the nature of things. Whatever the situation, however, the effect is the same, namely that it bridges the 'gap' between symbol and referent, so that they are seen, not as analogues of one another, arising from congruities between two isomorphic systems - as in the structuralist's model - but rather that they are conceived as participating in an association where some kind of shared identity exists, or is postulated, between the two terms³. And it is precisely in these circumstances that a theory of metaphor can come to our assistance in understanding the complexities and subtleties of such a relationship, for metaphorical utterances also play upon a notion of resemblance and shared 'identity'.

A theory of metaphor

The first thing to note, before all else, is that ideas of resemblance may vary between cultures. That is to say that while every society may classify or organize the world about it into various domains or categories, the principles of class inclusion or exclusion, and the actual criteria by which resemblance and differentiation are judged, may vary. In this respect ideas of resemblance are culturally specific. Arguably, however, wherever there is classification, so too is there resemblance in some form or another, and, following on from this, that ideas of resemblance and

difference - howsoever they may be defined - are common to all systems of thought. In this light, then, it is apparent that a study of ideas of resemblance may provide a useful point of departure in moving towards a better understanding of another culture's representations of the world - hence our present interest in metaphor theory as an analytical device.

In his seminal work entitled "Models & Metaphors" (1962), Max Black proposes what he calls an "interaction view of metaphor". The antecedents of this understanding of the metaphorical process lie in the works of I.A. Richards - for example, the "Philosophy of Rhetoric" (1936) - who was the first of the modern rhetoricians to break away from the presupposition of their Classical forefathers that metaphor, as a figure of discourse, was primarily concerned with denomination (Ricoeur 1976: 49) ⁴. As Ricoeur has remarked:

"metaphor has to do with the semantics of the sentence before it concerns the semantics of a word. And since metaphor only makes sense in an utterance, it is a phenomenon of *predication* not denomination" (1976: 49-50).

In other words, the use of metaphor says something about the subject of a sentence, and in this sense it informs us - it results in semantic innovation; in short, as with symbolic phenomena, what we are concerned with here is the creation of meaning.

It is the bringing together of two terms not normally found in association with one another which creates this new meaning, hence Black's

use of the word "interaction" in this context. Briefly, Black's thesis - incorporating slight modifications from a more recent article (1979) - can be summarized in the following way. A metaphorical utterance will contain two subjects: the principal or primary subject, which is relevant or continuous with the topic of discourse; and the subsidiary or secondary subject, which is removed or discontinuous, and which is substituted for the former (1962: 39; 1979: 28). The two subjects are best thought of as a "system of associated commonplaces" (1962: 40) - i.e. as a collection of attributes or qualities that are normally associated with a particular image or subject - and the metaphorical utterance works by projecting upon the primary subject a set of associated implications that compromise the "implicative complex" (1979: 28) of the secondary or subsidiary subject. In other words, "the presence of the primary subject incites the hearer to select some of the secondary subject's properties ...and...invites him to construct a parallel implication-complex that can fit the primary subject" (1979: 29).

In his original essay, Black refers to the statement 'Man is a wolf' in order to illustrate his understanding of the metaphorical process (1962: 39). In this instance 'man' constitutes the primary subject, continuous with the topic of discourse, and 'wolf' the secondary subject. Black writes:

"A suitable hearer will be led by the wolf-system of implications to construct a corresponding system of implications about the principal subject. But these implications will *not* be those comprised in the commonplaces *normally* implied by the literal uses of the word 'man'. The new implications must be determined by the pattern of implications associated with literal uses of the word 'wolf'. Any human traits that can without undue strain be talked about in 'wolf-language' will be rendered prominent, and any that cannot will be pushed into the background. The wolf-metaphor suppresses some

details, emphasizes others - in short, *organizes* our view of man" (1962: 41; emphasis in text).

This is a remarkably clear and concise examination of the way in which metaphors work, and one that has been extremely influential in recent years. Black is not, however, without his critics. For example, Searle finds it difficult to see in what way the "metaphorical speaker's meaning is a result of any interaction among the elements of the sentence in any literal sense of 'interaction'" (1979: 104). Furthermore, Searle also objects to Black's suggestion that metaphorical substitution involves both an extension of meaning on the part of the secondary subject (Black 1962: 38-39), and a general shift in "the meaning of words belonging to the same family or system as the metaphorical expression" (Black 1962: 45; Searle 1979: 115, 119). Instead Searle argues that the juxtaposition of primary and secondary subjects in a metaphorical utterance leads, not to the creation of new meaning as such, but rather to the *restriction* of *existing* meanings.

Briefly, Searle's position is based on his suggestion that "The question, 'How do metaphors work?' is a bit like the question, 'How does one thing remind us of another thing?'" He writes:

"There is no single answer to either question, though similarity obviously plays a major role in answering both. Two important differences between them are that metaphors are restricted and systematic; restricted in the sense that not every way that one thing can remind us of something else will provide a basis for metaphor, and systematic in the sense that metaphors must be communicable from speaker to hearer in virtue of a shared system of principles" (1979: 113)

The principles that are referred to here concern the way in which various qualities or attributes from the implication-complex of the secondary subject are perceived as being simultaneously applicable to the primary subject (Searle 1979: 116-119). The selective nature of this process suggests, according to Searle, that we are dealing *not* with semantic *innovation*, but on the contrary, with a *restriction* of meaning by which the semantic field surrounding the secondary subject is whittled down to those features which are relevant or salient to the topic of discourse (1979: 119). In this respect, to imply that any new meanings are created is fallacious and is derived from a confusion of "sentence or word meaning, which is never metaphorical, and speaker or utterance meaning, which can be metaphorical" (Searle 1979: 100)

Black counters this criticism by saying that what he really meant by the idea of a 'shift' in meaning was not so much a change in the literal meaning of the words involved but rather "a shift in the *speaker's* meaning - and the corresponding *hearer's* meaning - what both of them understand by words as used on the particular occasion" (1979: 29; emphasis in the text). It is this mental activity on the part of the speaker and his audience which, for Black, justifies his use of the term 'interaction'. Thus he writes:

"although I speak figuratively ... of the *subjects* interacting, such an outcome is of course produced in the minds of the speaker and hearer: it is they who are led to engage in selecting, organizing, and projecting. I think of a metaphorical statement (even a weak one) as a verbal action essentially demanding *uptake*, a creative response from a competent reader" (1979: 29; emphasis in the text).

In clarifying his position, Black would appear to have brought himself in line with Searle's distinction between speaker or utterance meaning, and word or sentence meaning. The issue still remains, however, of whether a word or term can ever acquire any of its metaphorical signification - even if only temporarily - once it has been used in such a way. In other words can speaker or utterance meaning ever become incorporated into sentence or word meaning?

At this point it is instructive to consider briefly the notion of 'dead' metaphors. Searle remarks that it is often very difficult to paraphrase a metaphorical statement even when there is no problem or ambiguity in interpreting what is meant by the utterance (1979: 97). For this reason Searle finds that

"dead metaphors are especially interesting... because, to speak oxymoronically, dead metaphors have lived on. They have become dead through continual use, but their continual use is a clue that they satisfy some semantic need " (Searle 1979: 98).

The point that I wish to make here is that in the case of these redundant metaphorical expressions, it is their very 'deadness' that argues for an acquisition of a new meaning, or meanings, on the part of the secondary subject. In other words, the fact that we no longer recognize their metaphorical nature suggests that what were once purely metaphorical implications, or projections, have -through stylistic convention or continual usage over time - become encompassed in the literal or everyday signification of the secondary term. In this respect the transformation of a novel or living metaphor into a dead one can be understood as a shift

from an extension of meaning to an inclusion of meaning, the cliché falling at some point between the two poles.

Take for example the word *debacle*, which comes from the French *débacler* - to unbar. In its original sense the term referred to the breaking up of ice in a river, or a sudden deluge, or violent rush of water, that carries blocks of stone and other debris before it (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). Its present day usage - which is almost invariably metaphorical in nature - has, however, to a very large extent obscured its original reference: so much so that a great many people are completely unaware of its literal application. Thus one finds that *debacle* is now often used in a social context to describe an inability to cohere and the subsequent dispersion of disaffected parties in diverse directions. In other words, certain elements belonging to the implicative complex of the root meaning of *debacle* - but not others - have, over time, become incorporated into a new meaning of the term which has separated itself off from its original domain of reference.

Evidently there is a certain overlap, or *resemblance*, between the two senses of *debacle* - just as there is in any successful metaphor - but in this instance the metaphorical significance of the term has acquired a pseudo-literal status. And it is this semantic shift from the metaphorical to the 'literal' which is of interest to us here, for the suggestion is that there may be certain parallels between this extension, or transformation, of meaning, and the way in which symbolic representations are internalized, or quite literally realized, by the members of a particular culture.

Obviously any claims for a belief in the literal veracity of the symbolic must be substantiated by a proper and thorough understanding of indigenous notions of substance, being, identity, and other ontological

issues. At the same time, one must also be careful to observe Needham's distinction between collective representation and ideation. That is to say,

"Whether one is analysing a single concept or a system of cultural categories, there is a distinction that needs to be clearly observed, namely that between the formal properties of collective representations and the mental operations, on the part of the individual human being, that may be carried out and expressed through the given categories. There is no necessary connection between a system of received ideas and the particular association of ideas in the process of thought" (Needham 1972: 156).

The philosophical nature of ontological studies has meant that this is an area of inquiry that, in the past, has been largely neglected or ignored by anthropologists who, as we have seen have preferred, for the most part, to take shelter behind the comfortable generalities of the term 'symbolic'. Conversely, ideation has been relegated to the domain of individual psychology, and in this respect has similarly been placed outside the field of anthropological explanation. But even the most sociologically oriented anthropologist still requires some way to understand how what are seemingly bizarre and fantastical representations of the world - that is to say, bizarre and fantastical in terms of the anthropologist's own categories (cf. Barley's comments p. 23) - are actually interpreted, or felt to make sense, by those who subscribe to them. Metaphor theory provides one such possibility in that metaphorical statements answer to their own set of truth conditions (Searle 1979: 94-99), and thus may fulfill certain rational demands for logical consistency and coherence, without having to make any further appeals to some literal reality or ultimate criterion of truth. At the same time, however, the

capacity of metaphors to provide us with a particular way of looking at things, and indeed thinking about them also, offers us an insight into how the purely symbolic may, in certain instances, appear to be 'real'. This last point is perhaps best demonstrated by considering the use of metaphor within our own culture, and so it is to this topic that I now turn.

Metaphorical perspectives

Munz reflects that:

"It would take very little argument to prove that if one eschewed all metaphorical expression... daily language would cease to exist and much human communication would become impossible. ... We live day in and day out in a world described by metaphor rather than literal statement" (1979: 57)

Lakoff & Johnson have provided evidence of the extent to which this may be true of the English language (1980), but in doing so, they go one step further to argue that we not only communicate in terms of metaphors, but also that we *think* and *act* according to our metaphorical representations of the world. Thus they write:

"we have found ... that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (1980: 3).

Whether or not their conclusions can in fact be supported is a moot point, and one that resurrects the hoary debate about the relationship between

thought and language. Sadly, this is not a subject that can be done proper justice within the scope of the present study; nevertheless, the remarks of these authors do serve to highlight the potential capacity of metaphor to function as an 'instrument of cognition' (Black 1979: 39), and hence as a screen, or stencil, through which our perceptions of 'reality' are passed or, at least, presented.

The last point should be stressed. As we saw earlier, a metaphorical utterance invites us to select, emphasize, suppress or otherwise arrange, various features of a primary subject through the superimposition of an implicative complex belonging to a secondary subject. In the case of the wolf metaphor, it "organizes our view of man" (Black 1962: 41). In short, metaphors may be said to provide us with a *perspective* - a particular way of seeing something.

In this light it is interesting to note that Black himself writes of the principal subject as being "'seen through' the metaphorical expression" (1962: 41; my emphasis). Similarly the literary philosopher Burke describes metaphor as

"a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this. If we employ the word 'character' as a general term for whatever can be thought of as distinct (any thing, pattern, situation, structure, nature, person, object, act, role, process, event, etc) then we could say that metaphor tells us something about one character as considered from the point of view of another character. And to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a *perspective* upon A" (1945: 503-4; emphasis in text).

In other words, the metaphorical utterance, like symbolic or mythological representations, constructs a particular view of things, processes, events, indeed of the world itself; in short, metaphor "tells us something new about reality" (Ricoeur 1976: 53).

This raises the question of the very nature of 'reality' in the first place. That is to say that if in some circumstances a metaphorical statement can be said to offer a perspective on the way things are, may it not also be true that in other instances the use of metaphor creates the very reality that it sets out to describe?

A good example of what I mean by this is provided by Searle's discussion of the numerous spatial metaphors that we employ in our description of temporal duration. These as he points out, are not themselves "based on literal similarities" (1979: 109) - i.e. any specific features or qualities that are shared by both space and time. Thus Searle asks:

"In 'time flies', or 'the hours crawled by', what is it that time does and the hours did which is literally like flying or crawling? We are tempted to say they went rapidly or slowly respectively, but of course 'went slowly' and 'went rapidly' are further spatial metaphors" (Searle 1979: 105).

It is very hard to escape from this tautological cycle for

"So deeply imbedded in our whole mode of sensibility are certain metaphorical associations that we tend to think there *must* be a similarity, or even that the association itself is a form of similarity. Thus, we feel inclined to say that the passage of time *just is like* spatial movement, but when we say this we forget that 'passage' is only yet another spatial metaphor for time and that the bald assertion of similarity, with no specification of the respect

of the similarity, is without content" (Searle 1979: 109; emphasis in text).

Part of our difficulty in perceiving time in anything other than spatial terms stems, I suspect, from the fact that we are dealing with a very dead set of metaphors. On the other hand, this particular example raises a very important aspect of metaphorical identifications which we have not as yet considered and which has often been overlooked or neglected in the literature. I refer here to the notion of colouration.

As we have seen, the formulation of a metaphor turns on the idea of resemblance. That is to say, the juxtaposition of primary and secondary subjects in a metaphorical utterance allows the transfer of certain attributes from the latter term to the former that are salient to the topic of discourse. The success with which this is achieved may, however, facilitate another kind of transfer - namely that of attributes or qualities that are *not* shared by the two subjects. This secondary transfer is called colouration and is clearly demonstrated in Sapir's example of the advertizing slogan 'Put a Tiger in Your Tank' (1977: 9-10). He writes that here we are concerned with

"a metaphor that certainly stresses colour... for there is very little in the way of shared features. The effect of the metaphor has ... to do with its colouration, the transfer of a tiger's world to that of gasoline. The advertisement 'tigerizes' the gasoline and, by metonymic extension, our automobile and ourselves. All of India, its jungles, its elephants, its tigers are in that gasoline, an exciting though hardly instructive thought" (Sapir 1977: 9-10).

It will be immediately obvious from this example that the process of colouration may play a very significant role in consolidating, or amplifying, a metaphorical identification that may have initially been founded on a somewhat contrived or speculative resemblance. That is to say, the process of colouration can lend substance to what in other respects may be a very slight or tenuous resemblance. In doing so it transfigures both the primary and the secondary subject, leading to the discovery of a new entity - in this instance, 'Tiger-petrol'- and this would appear to support Black's idea of a semantic innovation, or creation of meaning, on the part of the terms involved. In other words, one can argue that within our own culture, the semantic field of the term 'tiger' has been extended, in recent years, to include the meaning 'a quality of (some) petrols', which may be invoked even in circumstances that ordinarily lie outside the domain of motor-cars and internal combustion engines.

This might, perhaps, be a particularly personal view of tigers, but it serves to make an interesting point, namely that mere association may in some instances be sufficient to create a 'resemblance'. This is precisely the issue that is raised by Searle's discussion of time and its representation in spatial terms, and in this same connection it is important to note Black's observation that "It would be more illuminating in some ... cases to say that the metaphor creates the similarity than to say it formulates some similarity antecedently existing" (1962: 37). In other words, some metaphors may be regarded, not so much as informing us about the world, but rather as constructing that world for us.

This is a profound issue, and one that may interestingly be considered in connection with another, related topic - namely the status of

scientific discourse in relation to describing the 'way things are'. It is to this debate, therefore, that I turn next.

Metaphors and scientific discourse

In the opening chapter of *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss draws his now famous distinction between modern scientific thought and its 'primitive' antecedent - mythical reflection - which he refers to as a "science of the concrete" (1976: chl). The former is essentially abstract in nature and hence supposedly objective, being to do with "the discovery of an 'arrangement'" (1976: 12) of the facts obtained through careful observation. The latter, on the other hand, is restricted to the level of sensible properties (1976: 15), and in this respect is limited to discoveries of a certain type, namely "those which nature authorised from the starting point of a speculative organization and exploitation of the *sensible world in sensible terms* (Lévi-Strauss 1976: 16: my emphasis).

Developing his argument further, Lévi-Strauss argues that "[t]he elements of mythical thought ... lie half-way between percepts and concepts" (1978: 18), and that in this respect they are like signs. Thus he writes:

"Signs resemble images in being concrete entities but they resemble concepts in their powers of reference. Neither concepts nor signs relate exclusively to themselves; either may be substituted for something else. Concepts, however, have an unlimited capacity in this respect, while signs have not" (1976: 18).

It is in this use of signs that the science of the concrete resembles bricolage for while the modern scientist, or engineer, has, in theory at

least, "as many sets of tools and materials or 'instrumental sets', as there are different kinds of projects" (Lévi-Strauss 1976: 17), the mythical thinker, or bricoleur is pre-constrained by the "heterogeneous repertoire" of existing materials with which he has to 'make do' (1976: 17). In other words, the concrete nature of mythical reflection undermines its ability to obtain truly objective, or 'scientific', results - which are implicitly abstract and value-free - in much the same way that the bricoleur is constrained by the nature of his materials from achieving the kind of results that an engineer obtains through the conception of a design and the manufacture of appropriate parts.

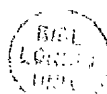
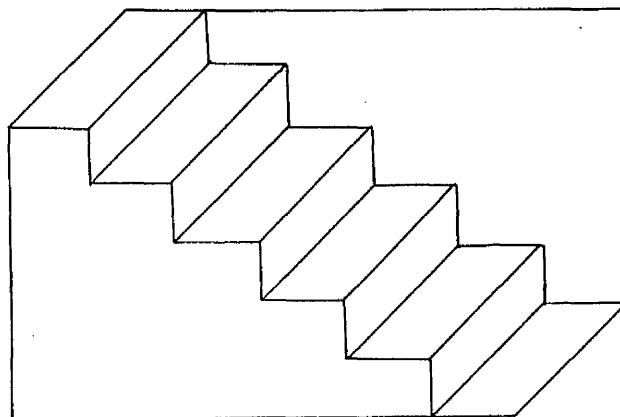
The question that is implicitly raised by Lévi-Strauss' argument is 'Just how objective and value free is scientific thought?'. This is a topic that has been explored at some length by Chalmers who seriously questions the popular belief that "careful and unprejudiced observation yields a secure basis from which probably true, if not true, scientific knowledge can be derived" (1985: 22). He calls this position that of the "naive inductivist" and shows that it is in fact derived from two key assumptions, namely that science starts with observation, and that observation yields a secure basis from which knowledge can be derived (1985: 22). This position Chalmers refutes on the grounds that observation is a subjective experience, dependant - in the case of visual perception - not only on what the observer 'sees' (i.e. in terms of the images that fall upon his retina), but also on his experience, existing knowledge, expectations and general mental state (1985: 22ff.). In other words, observations can ultimately be linked to existing ideas about the nature of things and for this reason "are as fallible as the theories they presuppose and therefore do not constitute a

completely secure basis on which to build scientific laws and theories" (Chalmers 1985: 30).

Without wishing to become too deeply embroiled in a discussion of the philosophy of science, and the role of metaphor in the formulation of a scientific 'paradigm', or tone of thought, it is nevertheless salutary to consider briefly a simple, but illuminating, illustration employed by Chalmers to demonstrate the interpretative dimension of observation. Referring to the drawing reproduced below, Chalmers writes that

"Most of us, when first looking at figure [1], see the drawing of a staircase with the upper surface of the stairs visible. But this is not the only way it can be seen. It can without difficulty also be seen as a staircase with the under surface of the stairs visible. Further, if one looks at the picture for some time, one generally finds, involuntarily, that what one sees changes frequently from a staircase viewed from above to a staircase viewed from below and back again. And yet it seems reasonable to suppose that, since it remains the same object viewed by the observer, the retinal images do not change. Whether the picture is seen as a staircase viewed from above or a staircase viewed from below seems to depend on something other than the image on the retina of the viewer" (Chalmers 1985: 24-25).

Figure 1



Chalmers goes on to add that experiments among a number of African peoples, whose cultures do not subscribe to the depiction of three dimensional objects by two dimensional perspective drawings, indicate that the members of these tribes would see the illustration not as a staircase but as a two dimensional array of lines (Chalmers 1985: 25). In other words, the point that Chalmers is making here is that although the observable 'facts' remain the same throughout - i.e. the lines on the page - their 'explanation' can differ according to the observer. In this respect the account given - though based on direct observation - constitutes more of an *interpretation* than it does an explanation and this interpretation is of course very much a question of perspective, which brings us back to our discussion of metaphor as a way of seeing things⁵.

Black opens an interesting discussion of the role of metaphor and analogy in scientific discourse with the remark that "scientists often speak of using models but seldom pause to consider the presuppositions and implications for their practice" (1962: 219). In doing so, he draws attention to the multiple meanings of the term 'model', which can be used to refer to scale models, design models, exemplars, or models which involve a change of medium such as hydraulic models of economic systems, or the use of electrical circuits in computers (1962: 221-222). As far as scientific models are concerned it is the latter which are of principal interest. Black refers to these as "analogue models" (1962: 222) where "some material object, system, or process [is] designed to reproduce as faithfully as possible in some new medium the *structure* or web of relationships in an original" (1962: 222; emphasis in text). In such instances, the key

principle underlying the construction, or suitability, of a particular model is one of isomorphism, or an "identity of structure" (Black 1962: 222-23).

The important thing to note here, as far as our present interests are concerned, is that in at least some instances the model is conceived not just simply as an expository device, but rather serves as an epistemological framework for making new discoveries. Black gives the example of how a geometrical problem in pure mathematics - which concerned the discovery of a method for dissecting a rectangle into a set of unequal squares - was eventually solved through the use of a theory of electrical networks (Black 1982: 231-32). He comments that

"It is sometimes said that the virtue of working with models is the replacement of abstractions and mathematical formulas by *pictures*, or any form of representation that is readily visualized. But the example just mentioned shows that this view emphasizes the wrong thing. It is not easier to visualize a network of electrical currents than to visualize a rectangle dissected into component squares: the point of thinking about the electrical currents is not that we can see or imagine them more easily, but rather that their properties are *better known* than those of their intended field of application" (Black 1962: 232; emphasis in text).

In other words, while in some instances the "use of a particular model may amount to nothing more than a strained and artificial description of a domain sufficiently known otherwise, [in others] it may ... help us to notice what otherwise would be overlooked, to shift the relative emphasis attached to details - in short, to *see new connections*" (Black 1962: 237; emphasis in text).

At this point it will be apparent that there is a great deal of similarity between the use of analogue models in scientific discourse and the role of metaphors in everyday language. By this I mean that analogue models, like metaphorical statements, may be said to create a certain view or perspective on a particular domain or subject matter. In doing so they allow us to perceive certain aspects or features of this domain or subject which were otherwise unknown, or obscured, by the absence of this vantage point. There is, however, an important difference between the two strategies in that one is based on an identity of structure, whereby the internal arrangement of elements within each domain are regarded as being systematically alike or isomorphic, while the other is based on an idea of shared properties or qualities.

It may be useful to recall here our earlier distinction between analogy and metaphor, the one being concerned with relationships or proportions, and the other with properties. It is this distinction which, I suggest, underlies Black's initial reluctance to equate analogue models directly with metaphors (1962: 236, 238-241). More recently, however, Black seems to have withdrawn his reservations for he states that

"I am now impressed, as I was insufficiently so when composing Metaphor [1962], by the tight connections between the notions of models and metaphors. Every implication-complex supported by a metaphor's secondary subject, I now think, is a *model* of the ascriptions imputed to the primary subject: Every metaphor is the tip of a submerged model" (Black 1979: 31).

In this instance Black seems to overlook his earlier use of the term 'analogue model' - based on an identity of structure - in favour of a more

general meaning of model. The distinction between the two is important, however, for the principle of a resemblance on the basis of shared attributes or qualities, which underwrites the juxtaposition of terms in a metaphorical utterance, does not presuppose the isomorphism of an analogue model which is based on an identity of structure. Conversely, the analogical dimension of the latter does not presuppose a set of shared features or properties. This is not to suggest that the two domains that are brought into conjunction with one another in a metaphorical utterance may not also share certain structural or organizational similarities, but in this context the identity of structure is not in itself a necessary condition as it is in the case of analogue models which do not involve any notion of shared attributes.

Black's recent failure to maintain, or at least re-state, these distinctions is in itself very interesting and significant, for it highlights a crucial issue - namely the ease with which it is possible to pass from metaphor to analogy, or alternatively, to slip from analogy into metaphor. To illustrate what I mean by this, I would like to consider the following line from Byron: "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold". This can be deconstructed in two different ways: on the one hand as an analogy; on the other, as two systematically related metaphors. In the first instance we have a situation which can be represented diagrammatically as:

Assyrian : Children of Israel

Wolf : Sheep

where the emphasis is placed on a resemblance or congruity of relationships occurring in two different domains. Alternatively, however, one can construct two metaphorical statements of the form: 'Assyrians are wolves'

and 'The Children of Israel are sheep'. These two metaphorical identifications are, however, related to one another - they are *systematic* - in that they are both components in a single analogical equation. In this instance, what may initially be regarded as an analogical figure is in fact transformed into an extended metaphor. Evidently this is not necessarily true for all analogical figures - for example, it is difficult to find any sort of resemblance between the numbers and letters that are brought together in an algebraic formula. Nevertheless, it is equally apparent that some analogical figures may lend themselves very readily to reinterpretation as a series of systematically related metaphors.

This capacity to slip from analogy into metaphor and back again is clearly illustrated in Black's discussion of Maxwell's shift from an early conception of electro-magnetism as a "purely geometrical idea of the motion of an imaginary fluid" (Maxwell, cited in Black 1962: 226); to one where he writes of a "wonderful medium" filling all space, whose lines of force should "not be regarded as mere mathematical abstractions", but instead should be seen as "the directions in which the medium is exerting a tension like that of a rope, or rather, like that of our muscles" (Maxwell, cited in Black 1962: 227). As Black himself observes

"there is certainly a vast difference ... between thinking of the electrical field *as if* it were filled with a material medium, and thinking of it *as being* such a medium. One approach uses a detached comparison reminiscent of simile and argument from analogy; the other requires an identification typical of metaphor" (1962: 228).

To summarize briefly, it is evident that in those instances where there is a particularly close, or 'successful', fit between a model and the

domain that it seeks to explain, there is also present a risk of inferring existential statements about the world from what is, initially at any rate, merely an "heuristic fiction" (Black 1962: 228). This tendency would appear to be not uncommon in scientific discourse as Black has pointed out. He writes:

"The *existential use of models* seems ... characteristic of the practice of the great theorists in physics. Whether we consider Kelvin's 'rude mechanical models', Rutherford's solar system, or Bohr's model of the atom, we can hardly avoid concluding that these physicists conceived themselves to be describing the atom *as it is*, and not merely offering mathematical formulas in fancy dress. In using theoretical models, they were not comparing two domains from a position neutral to both. They used language appropriate to the model in thinking about the domain of application: they worked not *by* analogy, but *through* and by means of an underlying analogy. Their models were conceived to be more than expository or heuristic devices" (1962: 228-29).

Closer to home, Needham has drawn attention to "Durkheim's constant reliance on physical, and particularly electrical, analogies in making his sociological arguments" (1976: 83). He points to the "stress that, together with Mauss, he [Durkheim] laid on a presumed causal connexion between social forms and symbolic classifications (1903), such that a sociological explanation of symbolic categories was thought to consist in the establishment of systematic connexions between these and the modes of social grouping by which they had been determined" (1976: 83). Needham adds that "Mauss provides a typical instance of the idiom at issue when he opens his essay on the gift with the question, which he describes as the problem to which he specially applies himself: 'What *force* is there in the

thing given which makes the recipient return it?" (Mauss 1925: 33; Needham 1976: 83; my emphasis). Needham concludes:

"In one such example after another, and in a train of argument extending into more recent discussions about primitive thought and western rationality, the idiom of scientific method has in this way tended to bias the interpretation of alien ideologies. With the progress of science the idiom has acquired new, post-Newtonian terms, particularly those elaborated in quantum mechanics; but this development is likely only to have confirmed the tendency to conceive conceptual problems in terms borrowed from the most dominant and successful of the sciences. The theories behind the vocabulary of forces have become more subtle and obscure, but the idiom has not for this reason become the less attractive to social anthropologists seeking explanatory models" (1976: 83).

In summary, it is apparent, even from the all too brief discussion above, that modern science may not be quite as abstract, or free from the use of imagery, as might initially be inferred from Lévi-Strauss' distinction between the nature of scientific discourse and that of mythical reflection, or the science of the concrete. That is to say, one finds that the scientist, like the mythical bricoleur, frequently resorts to the use of concrete images and pre-existing materials, or hypotheses, in the formulation of new scientific theories. Admittedly, these images and extant hypotheses may themselves be drawn from the corpus of scientific knowledge about the world; nevertheless, their extension into new domains, or fields of inquiry, has obvious parallels with the actions of the mythical bricoleur who characteristically "builds up structured sets, not directly with other structured sets but by using the remains and debris of events: in French 'des bribes et des morceaux', or odds and ends in

English, fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or a society" (Lévi-Strauss 1976: 21-22).

At a speculative level this practice may, in itself, be no bad thing since such a strategy may well provide an epistemological framework for new discoveries. There is, however, a certain risk involved in this method of procedure, namely the danger of an ontological - and essentialising - slip from analogical comparison to metaphorical identification. That is to say, an initial perception of an identity of structure or form may subsequently engender the illusion that the two domains are in fact 'alike' in other respects, i.e. in terms of shared properties and qualities. This metaphorical identification may then subsequently acquire a metaphysical status so that the model becomes a "self-certifying myth" (Black 1962: 242) that is "permanently insulated from empirical disproof" (Black 1962: 242. In this last instance it is clear that there would then be little to choose between the so-called 'explanations' of science, and the collective representations of pre-scientific peoples.

Metaphors, analogy and structural analysis

The principal aim of the preceeding discussion of analogical (analogue) models in scientific discourse, was to provide some indication of the extent to which even the so-called 'hard' sciences of physics and chemistry may themselves depend upon the use of imagery and metaphors, not only as a means of exposition, but also as an epistemological strategy. In doing so, my intention was to narrow the gap between the explanations of science, and so-called symbolic representations of the

world, and at the same time, to show how readily the purely imaginative may be translated into the 'real', even within a scientific context. In pursuing these arguments a crucial issue was raised - namely the apparent ease with which it is possible to slip from a strictly analogical correspondence based on an identity of structure, to one of metaphorical identification, based on the notion of shared properties or attributes. This phenomenon has obvious and very significant implications for the anthropologist in that it suggests possible ways in which the abstract and analogical figures that are revealed by structural analysis may be translated into a set of paradigmatic associations or identifications that are of a more 'intimate', even metaphysical, nature, involving the idea of shared properties, or a common identity.

This area of study concerning the interplay of analogy and metaphor in cultural discourse is one that has been examined in some depth by both Sapir and Crocker in their joint inquiry into the "social use of metaphor" (Sapir & Crocker 1977). Crocker, for example, notes that

"The postulation of analogical systems as 'codes', whereby the complexities of relationships between social entities can be manipulated in terms of paradigmatic unities, has served as an impetus to structural analysis in recent social anthropology. [Thus] we have talk of transformations, the generative quality of the logical models embodied in myths, [and] dazzling symbolic 'equations' between all manner of highly distinctive entities" (1977: 50).

He adds, however, that while "the logic of any analogic system is a fascinating and seductive entertainment for sophisticated minds, such forms still must be demonstrated to have some relevance for those dull clods who have not had the advantage of advanced training in symbolic

analysis" (1977: 50). And it is at precisely this point, of course, that a theory of metaphor and the other tropes can come to our assistance, for they are in effect the "semantic modes" by which the purely formal, or analogical, is translated into the 'meaningful' or 'felt' (Crocker 1977: 50). In this respect, Crocker argues, "metaphors must be viewed not just as a way into the generative logical models of a society, but also as a way out, as ways people come to 'understand' and, then, act" (1977: 50).

In contemplating this shift from a purely formal or structural correspondence, to one involving an identification that is metaphorical in nature, it is evident that such a transformation may be greatly assisted, or enhanced, by the process of colouration (see pp. 45-46). That is to say, if two terms or elements, are regularly brought into conjunction with one another on the basis of their respective positions in two isomorphic series, then it may well be possible to subsequently discover all sorts of further 'resemblances' that are of a metaphorical nature (c.f. Black's remark that in some instances it may be more illuminating "to say that the metaphor creates the similarity than to say it formulates some similarity antecedently existing" [1962: 37; see p. 46]). The issue is succinctly put by Crocker, who observes that

"metaphors involve the identifying of attributes of two usually segregated entities, a process which is termed 'transfer' and is associated with the expressive 'colouration' of these figures and the way the terms are simultaneously apprehended as like and unlike. Since...[analogies]...involve no such equating of the two terms, they do not 'transfer'. It is just this lack of 'colour' which makes many analogies appear so pedantic and formal, or at best, as in the case of many proverbs, somewhat abstract and remote 'parallels'. We deduce from this that when there is no identification (no transfer, no colour), the metaphor is not felt but only 'thought', which fits in with the programmatic, cognitive, systematic and 'cold' characteristics of analogy. But, ...once...[an]...analogy is established all sorts of internal resemblances between the

juxtaposed terms can be 'discovered': to put it much too simply, 'thinking' can generate 'feeling', here as in other dimensions of human behaviour" (1977: 56).

In short, the suggestion here is that it is the mental capacity to slip from analogical comparison to metaphorical identification and back again which underpins symbolic systems of thought and action , and which imbues symbolic associations with a certain 'reality' or 'credibility' which they might otherwise lack.

At this point it is interesting to consider one further aspect of representation which I have not as yet mentioned. I refer here to the notion of exemplification. As we have seen, metaphors involve the transfer of attributes or qualities from one domain to another. The important thing to notice in this particular instance, however, is that this transfer can work both ways so that not only do we arrive at a new perspective on the principal subject, but at the same time we are also asked to reconsider our existing perception of the secondary subject . Thus Black points out that while "the presence of the primary subject incites the hearer to select some of the secondary subject's properties ...[and]... invites him to construct a parallel implication-complex that can fit the primary subject" (1979: 29) it also "reciprocally induces parallel changes in the secondary subject" (Black 1979: 29). In other words, metaphorical transfer may be reflexive, and it is this aspect which leads us to the idea of exemplification.

Briefly, exemplification is defined by Goodman as the "reference by a sample to a feature of the sample" (1984: 59). For instance, "a tailor's swatch, in normal use, exemplifies its colour, weave, and thickness, but

not its size or shape; the note a concertmaster sounds before the performance exemplifies pitch but not timbre, duration or loudness"

(Goodman 1984: 59). In this respect, exemplification, "far from being a variety of denotation, runs in the opposite direction, not from label to what the label applies to but from something a label applies to back to the label (or the feature associated with that label)" (Goodman 1984: 59).

One might almost consider this relationship as a form of denotation by 'inversion', but we are not dealing simply with the converse of denotation,

"for exemplification is selective, obtaining only between the symbol and some but not others of the labels denoting it or properties possessed by it. Exemplification is not mere possession of a feature but requires also reference to that feature; such reference is what distinguishes the exemplified from the merely possessed features. Exemplification is thus a certain subrelation of the converse of denotation, distinguished through a return reference to denoter by denoted" (Goodman: 1984: 59).

The importance of these ideas as far as our present interests are concerned is that it may in some instances be very easy to slip from a metaphorical reading of the representation of A as B - in which A resembles B on the basis of certain postulated properties or features - to one in which B actually *exemplifies* A, by virtue of B's possession of certain qualities which typify, or define A. If this seems rather obtuse, the point to note here is the exemplification of A by means of B not merely "organizes" our view or perspective of A as in a metaphorical representation, but rather it actually tells us what A *is* by reference to

qualities that are exhibited in B. In other words, what we are dealing with here is an ontological statement relating to the very nature of A.

At this point one is again confronted with questions concerning indigenous notions of substance, being and identity. As I indicated earlier (p. 24), the answers to these kinds of question are not often to be found in the anthropological literature, and the Iban ethnography is no exception to this. A way round this problem, as I have already suggested, is to treat Iban collective representations as largely metaphorical in content, and simply to note those instances where the Iban themselves would appear to impute a more metaphysical significance to the imagery with which we are dealing. The advantage of this approach, as I pointed out before, is that metaphors fulfill their own set of truth conditions and logical consistency, and thus can be examined in their own terms without having to be tied to an idea of literal truth, or some vision of reality. Even so, if we are to make proper use of metaphor as an analytical concept, we must still have some means or criteria by which we can 'fix' the status of metaphor within an alien linguistic and philosophical tradition. That is to say, are Iban cultural metaphors to be regarded simply as communicatory 'flourishes' - as expository devices that fulfill an expressive function; or should they instead be seen as "cognitive instruments" (Black 1979: 40) - conceptual structures through which those aspects of the world which are less tangible, less readily reducible to empirical description, are actualized and made known?

Clearly this issue is closely related to the question of the ontological status of Iban collective representations, and both can be dealt with, for the purposes of the present analysis, in the same way - namely by treating Iban collective representations, not so much as

propositions about how the world *is*, but rather as *assertions* about how the world *might be*. The advantage of this approach is that it still permits a rigorous and systematic examination of the internal logic of Iban collective representations while allowing us, for the moment at least, to side step the question of the ontological or metaphysical status of Iban imagery. In this respect, the present study makes no absolute claims on behalf of what the Iban 'really' believe - with their implicit reference to some hypothetical collective consciousness; rather it should be seen as an *interpretation* of Iban society, and the world that they inhabit, based as far as possible on the indigenous terms and categories that the Iban themselves employ in their own description of the universe.

Summary & Conclusion

The principal interest of this study lies in its examination of Iban collective representations and, in particular, its exploration of the role of plants and other organic imagery in Iban oral literature and ritual action. The sophistication and complexity of this indigenous scheme of things requires that the analysis should go beyond the generalities of the term symbolic, and so the primary aim of this chapter has been to assemble a set of analytical tools that are better suited to our purposes. Literary criticism has been an important source of inspiration in this respect, in that it has provided us with a number of relational categories for breaking down the complex web of relationships that underlie so-called symbolic systems of thought and representation. These include synecdoche, metonymy, analogy, metaphor and exemplification, all of which may be applied in their different ways to deconstructing the various connections

between a symbol or signifier, and that which it 'stands for' - the signified.

One of the most exciting aspects of this methodological approach is the implications that it has for more conventional structural analysis. Tambiah has remarked that

"Between Lévi-Strauss' message and sign-oriented intellectualism, represented in the statement that natural species are chosen not because they are good to eat but because they are good to think, and the actor-oriented moralism of Fortes, (1967), represented in the statement that animals are good to prohibit because they are good to eat, lies scope for an imaginative reconstitution and reconciliation of the structural properties of symbolic systems *qua* systems and the effectiveness of symbols to bind individuals and groups to moral rules of conduct. Cultures and social systems are, after all, not only thought but also lived" (1977: 165).

This, of course, is precisely the issue that I have addressed here. That is to say, our understanding of the way in which it is possible to slip from the purely formal, or systematic, correspondence of analogy, to the qualitative, or homogeneous, relationship of a metaphorical identification, provides us with new insight into the means by which the various 'symbolic' associations that are revealed by structural analysis are actualized, or 'made real', for those who subscribe to them. In this respect the explanatory power of structural analysis is evidently greatly enhanced by its combination with a theory of metaphor and other tropes.

There still remains, of course, the problem of the ontological status of metaphor. This, as I have already indicated, cannot be properly dealt with until further field research has provided us with an understanding of indigenous notions of substance, being, identity and so forth. If, however,

like Foucault, we consider culture as a form of discourse, then for the purposes of the present study Iban collective representations can be treated as a kind of commentary or 'text'. And, as Ricoeur points out, "the text speaks of a possible world and of a possible way of orienting oneself within it" (1976: 88). What is of interest to us here then, is why the Iban, as a people, should choose to present the world in such a way. What does it do for people? And who benefits from such a scheme? It is precisely these issues that my thesis sets out to examine.

NOTES

1. It is arguable that many of the criticisms levelled against the use of 'symbolic' as an analytical category might equally well be applied to the term 'ritual'. My retention of the latter throughout this study therefore requires some qualification. For our present purposes, then, the term ritual shall be defined as describing any set of culturally prescribed activities, or procedures, whose methodological principles, or ordination, cannot be readily incorporated within a western, or 'scientific', theory of cause and effect. For example, while the cultivation of rice can, on the one hand, be seen as a purely economic strategy, one finds that much of Iban agriculture cannot be related to simply ecological or horticultural considerations, but appeals instead to a further set of ideas that include the conception of a rice 'soul', or 'spirit' (*semengat padi*), and the supposed existence of certain farming deities. Activities that are related to the latter views, can, for the purpose of analysis, be conveniently described as 'ritual' in nature; one should note, however, that this does not mean to say that the Iban themselves necessarily interpret their actions as being symbolic, or that they qualitatively distinguish them from what we would understand to be the purely pragmatic aspects of rice farming.

2. Needham, in his essay on analogical classification (1980: 41-62), draws attention to Kant's illuminating assertion, in the *Prolegomena*, that analogy means "not, as the word is commonly taken, an imperfect similarity of two things, but a perfect similarity of two relations between quite dissimilar things" (Needham 1980: 46).

3. Mention should be made here of Barley's recent development of the idea of motivation to distinguish between two forms - internal and external. He writes:

 "The first makes an appeal purely to structural rules. It is the sort of motivation that is encapsulated in the rules of a generative grammar in its simplest form. Given an initial element, it can be fed through a series of rules that map it onto a surface structure. Saussure (1974: 161) ... deals with it under the name of 'analogy'. The second form of motivation makes appeal to the outside world, the world of sense qualities and encyclopaedic knowledge in an unstructured form" (Barley 1983: 22)

The point that is made here is that the rules, or generative grammar, that govern a structured set of symbols, may themselves be regarded as a form of motivation in that they ordain various permutations, or configurations that are possible within the limits imposed by the overall structure of the system. In this connection it is therefore interesting to note Lévi-Strauss' own remarks that while "the linguistic sign is arbitrary a priori, but ceases to be arbitrary a posteriori (1979b: 91). By this he means that "[t]he arbitrary character of the linguistic sign is ... only provisional [for] [o]nce a sign has been created its function becomes explicit, as related, on the one hand, to the biological structure of the brain and, on the other, to the aggregate of other signs - that is, to the linguistic universe, which always tends to be systematic" (1979b: 94).

4. C.f. Aristotle's remarks that metaphor "is the application to a thing of a name that belongs to something else" (Poetics 21:2).
5. One should note that Black also makes a similar use of a geometrical figure - in this instance the Star of David - in expanding upon his idea of metaphor as a perspective (Black 1979: 33-4).

Chapter III

THE IBAN: AN HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general introduction to the Iban ethnography, and to give a brief account of the historical background of Sarawak since the advent of European influence in the mid nineteenth century. As I have already pointed out (p.7), there are certain inherent difficulties surrounding any reconstruction of Iban society from the ethnographic literature, owing to the temporal and scholastic diversity of the sources. At the same time, even if it were possible, a complete description of every aspect of the Iban way of life would still be beyond the scope of this present introduction. For these reasons then, the principal intention in this chapter is simply to equip the reader with a general understanding of the most characteristic features of Iban society, past and present, and to note where possible, the changes that have taken place during the time-span of the ethnographic records.

While no attempt is made at formal analysis in this chapter, there is, however, a certain relationship between this purely ethnographic

description and the study which follows. By this I mean that in the writing of this chapter, I am conscious of the fact that my selection of the material and its manner of presentation has been influenced in no small way by the analysis which succeeds it. In other words, although this chapter is ostensibly devoid of analytical comment, the content is inevitably structured by an understanding of Iban society arrived at by my own examination and interpretation of Iban collective representations and cultural metaphors. In this respect, therefore, there is a dialectical relationship between this introduction and the analysis that follows, so that in one sense the present chapter is as much a part of the analysis as the subsequent chapters that come after it. As it happens, my views on the nature or general character of traditional Iban society do not differ radically from the opinions of previous authors; nevertheless, I suggest that the relationship between the presentation of the data in this chapter and the rest of the study should still be kept in mind.

The state of Sarawak

I would like to begin with a few words about the history of Sarawak as a state, for this has inevitably had an effect on the lives and fortunes of the Iban and other tribal peoples that live within its boundaries. Sarawak lies along the north west coast of Borneo, being some 450 miles in length and varying from 40 to 120 miles in width, the total area covering approximately 48,300 square miles. From the fifteenth century onwards this region was, nominally at least, under the rule of the Islamic Sultanate of Brunei, an entrepot principality situated to the east. Provincial governors represented the Sultan in the region and collected

tribute from the various localized Malay chiefdoms situated along the coast (Pringle 1970: 43 ff.). The latter were, in their turn, supported by the various tribal peoples of the interior, who traded their allegiance and military assistance in return for salt and sea-fish (Pringle 1970: 59-65).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, several of these local groups were in revolt and the 1830s saw the military presence of Raja Muda Hassim, heir apparent to the throne of Brunei, in the province of Sarawak in an effort to restore allegiance to the Sultanate. In this task he was assisted by the English adventurer James Brooke, who was subsequently rewarded for his services by being himself proclaimed Raja and Governor of Sarawak in 1841. Additional lands were acquired in 1853 and 1861, while James Brooke's nephew and successor, Charles Brooke, succeeded in extending the territory still further by a combination of cession, annexation and purchase, until by 1905, the state of Sarawak had been brought to the size that it is today (more than twenty times that originally acquired by James Brooke in 1841).

In the early years of its existence the Brooke Raj met with fierce resistance from the indigenous population, and in particular, the Iban tribes of the Saribas and Skrang regions. This opposition was ruthlessly put down with the assistance of the British Navy in the name of the suppression of piracy and by the 1850s, following the massacre of some 800 Saribas and Skrang tribesmen at Beting Marau, much of the coastal region had been brought under Brooke control. From then on the Raj gradually extended its dominion over the 'rebellious' peoples of the interior, recruiting indigenous support by exploiting traditional animosities between the tribes. It was not, however, until the end of the

1920s that the Raja's authority had been firmly established throughout the region.

Although the policy of the Brooke regime was to interfere as little as possible with the indigenous institutions of Bornean society, the establishment of European rule inevitably affected many areas of tribal society. Nevertheless, quite some effort was made by the Brooke Raj to adhere to the principles and values operating under the traditional or customary laws (*adat*) of the land. Nor was there an attempt on the part of the authorities to coerce the native population to adopt Christianity, although missionary stations were in fact allowed to be set up among the various tribes. Even the ban on headhunting - which was perhaps the most profound threat to the traditional way of life, at least in as far as the Iban were concerned - was compromised to a certain extent by the fact that those tribes who supported the Raja, and who made up the bulk of his armed forces, were allowed to take heads as a reward for their services in punitive raids against 'rebellious' tribes who had not accepted foreign dominion. In these circumstances then, much of the 'pre-colonial' way of life and culture of the peoples of Sarawak, if not actually preserved, was at least allowed to survive in a somewhat evolved form until the Second World War when Sarawak was occupied by Japanese forces.

The return of Brooke rule at the end of hostilities found Sarawak in economic decline and with limited resources available for a recovery. Accordingly, the third raja, Raja Vyner Brooke, decided to cede the territory to the British Government, and in 1946 Sarawak became a Crown Colony. In many respects, this change of rule had little immediate impact on the lives of the majority of the population of Sarawak, for much of the Brooke ethos pervaded the colonial administration. In 1963, however,

Sarawak was granted independence in order to join the newly formed Federation of Malaysia, and since that time the pressures to modernize have steadily increased and the processes of social change accelerated. Nevertheless, it is still true to say that beyond the immediate vicinity of the towns and plantations, much of an earlier way of life remains intact, protected by the geographical isolation imposed by Sarawak's mountainous terrain and dense forestation (although these natural 'defences' are being rapidly eroded by the incursion of television and radio communication). In this last respect, the present study - while concentrating for the most part on 'traditional' elements of Iban culture (cf. my comments p. 7), retains a distinctly contemporary relevance, even in the face of rapid social and economic development in the region.

The Iban and their migrations

The Iban are a riverine people, living in longhouse communities' spread along the major rivers of Sarawak and their tributaries. They are the single most populous ethnic grouping in the region, numbering some 303,000 in the 1970 census, and making up to 1/3 of the population of this East Malaysian state. Racially they are described in the ethnographic literature as proto-Malay (Haddon 1901: 321; Hose & McDougall 1912, II: 248; Freeman 1981: 5)), while linguistically the Iban language is classified among the Malay group of languages although it is not so readily intelligible to speakers of Peninsular and Indonesian Malay that it can be regarded as a dialect (Richards 1981: ix).

Iban society is founded upon a subsistence economy that revolves around the cultivation of hill rice. The method that they employ is that

of shifting cultivation - a slash and burn policy that encourages periodic migration to fresh tracts of land. This prerequisite has played an important role in the shaping of Iban society, leading to an expansionist strategy of migration, settlement, and migration over a ten year cycle (Freeman 1961: 162). Since the late nineteenth century, however, increasing restrictions have been placed on Iban migration owing to the serious ecological consequences of this profligate method of land usage. These attempts have met with only a limited amount of success and the ethos of migration still predominates in contemporary Iban society. For this reason, then, it is important to know something of the history of the Iban people in Sarawak.

The Iban first arrived in Sarawak sometime in the 16th century, migrating from the Kapuas river in Kalimantan via the Kumpang valley (Jensen 1974: 18; Freeman 1981: 5; see p. 511-512 for maps). They settled initially along the Lupar river, which is still known to this day as 'The River' (*Batang Ai*) (Jensen 1974: 18), and subsequent migrations have continued, for the most part, to follow the course of the major rivers of Sarawak which constitute an extensive network of natural highways in this densely forested region.

From the Lupar river the Iban spread out: some moving downstream and westwards to the Undup and Lingga; others going upstream and eastwards to the Ulu Ai (lit. 'headwaters') and its tributaries, the Mepi, Engkari, Delok and Jinggin; and still others travelling in a northerly direction along the Lemanak and Skrang rivers (Jensen 1974: 19; Uchibori 1978: map 2). The progress of the westerly bloc was halted by the sea, but those in the east had reached the headwaters of the Katibas by the early nineteenth century and from there subsequently spread into the upper

Rèjang (mid nineteenth century) and the Balèh (late nineteenth century) (Freeman 1970: 132-142). At the same time the Iban of the Lemanak and Skrang rivers had also continued to advance northwards, some of them turning west towards the coast and becoming established along the estuarine reaches of the Saribas river in the seventeenth century (Freeman 1981: 5), while others proceeded upstream to the headwaters of the Entabai, Julau, and Kanowit (Sandin 1967a: 74-75, 80-81; Freeman 1970: 131-3).

Whereas the earliest pioneers had encountered little opposition, invading primary forest that was largely uninhabited, save for a few isolated bands of nomadic hunter and gatherers (Punan), subsequent advances met with more serious resistance (Jensen 1974: 18-19). This opposition consisted of the Sèru and Bukitan in the Saribas, Krian and Skrang regions (Sandin 1967a: 36-7; 45; 76-8; Jensen 1974: 18-19); The Ukit and Melanau of the Rèjang valley (Sandin 1967a: 74-5; Freeman 1970: 134; Jensen 1974: 20); and the Kayan and Kèjang peoples of the upper Rèjang (Freeman 1970: 133-4, 150n; Jensen 1974: 20). The last group - the tribes of the upper Rèjang - proved to be particularly resilient in resisting Iban advances and it was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that they were finally defeated by the Iban invasion.

Interestingly, it was the Brooke Raj that assisted the Iban in overcoming their strongest opponents for by this time the state of Sarawak had been extended to include the Rèjang river and the native populations of this region were accordingly classified as 'rebels', owing to their reluctance to accept European dominion. It was in these circumstances that two large-scale punitive expeditions were mounted in order to pacify the area. These were led by the heir apparent, Tuan Muda Charles Brooke, and consisted for the most part of Iban warriors recruited

from 'loyalist' tribes, including those of the Katibas river who were already in confrontation with the Kayan and Kèjang. The second of the campaigns - the great expedition of 1863 - involved some 12,000 men and was ostensibly launched in order to avenge the murder of two government officers - Fox and Steele - in 1859. Its effect, however, was the overwhelming defeat of the Kayan in the upper Rejang which assured the Iban of undisputed access to the Baleh and the fertile, unsettled lands to the north of the Rejang (Freeman 1970: 133-4; Jensen 1974: 20). After this decisive victory, the Iban were never seriously opposed again, and they continued to advance in a north easterly direction towards the Baram river.

Attempts were in fact made by the Brooke administration to restrain this subsequent wave of expansion, but these achieved only a partial success so that large-scale Iban migration - whether authorized or not - persisted well into the twentieth century. By this time, the Iban had advanced as far as the Bintulu river (Jensen 1974: 20), and to this day they have continued to move gradually eastwards, so that Iban longhouses are now being established across the border with the states of Brunei and Sabah in the extreme north east of the country (Jensen 1974: 21; Sutlive 1978: 20, 23). The main concentration of Iban, however, is still to be found along the rivers of the Second and Third Divisions, the population of these communities providing a geographical testimony to the first great Iban expansion of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The uniformity of Iban culture:

The widespread diffusion of the Iban along the rivers of Sarawak from the 16th century onwards raises the question of cultural uniformity.

For generations the Iban have lived in dispersed communities in widely separated river valleys and often, as we have seen, in contact with other, non-Iban peoples. This combination of geographical isolation and alien influences has inevitably led to a certain degree of cultural divergence between one area and another. This tendency has then been further complicated by the importance that is attached to dreams, which are interpreted as communications from the gods, and which are an often active component in the processes of cultural innovation (Freeman 1975: 284-87). Collectively these factors have contributed to the development of regional variations which are most clearly seen in the contrast between the long-settled Iban communities of the Saribas river and surrounding coastal areas², and their distantly related fellow-Iban in the pioneering regions of the Balèh and Ulu Ai in the east (Richards 1981: ix). Whereas the former have had a long history of contact with Bukitan, Malay, Chinese and European influences, the latter have remained to a large extent isolated from exotic contacts and innovations by virtue of their geographical remoteness from the coastal regions. As a result there are some quite major cultural differences between the two areas.

To elaborate, one finds that while the Balèh Iban still adhere closely to the egalitarian ethos that characterizes traditional Iban social ideology (Freeman 1981: 1), the Saribas Iban, who from the early 18th century onwards had come into regular contact with the Malay chiefdoms along the coast, were "drawn into the purview of a highly stratified social order in which there was an incessant concern with genealogically-defined rank and honorific titles" (Freeman 1981: 5). This Malay influence is reflected in the Saribas appropriation of Malay titles such as *Orang Kaya* and *Temenggong* (Sandin 1967a: 60; 1970: 89 ff.; Freeman 1981: 6), and their

preoccupation with genealogical descent (Sather 1977a: 158). Thus, while Freeman found that the longest line of succession that he was able to record in the Balèh region extended over only five generations (1970: 32; c.f. Richards 1981: 405), in the Saribas, lengthy genealogies (*tusut*) are traced back over thirty generations - often with a deity as the apical ancestor - while the ability to recall long lines of descent is greatly respected (Sandin 1967a: 96 seq; Jensen 1974: 95-6; Richards 1981: 405)³. Similarly, one finds that the terms that are normally used to refer to the mother's and father's sides of the family - *tanah indai* (lit. 'mother's ground') and *tanah apai* ('father's ground') - are replaced in the Saribas by the terms *pangkat indai* and *pangkat apai*, *pangkat* being the Malay word for rank or status (Freeman 1981: 7).

Obviously these quite significant differences between Balèh and Saribas Iban society raise the question of whether the latter population can be properly included under the same heading as other Iban 'tribes'^{4,5}. We are fortunate, however, that this issue is well covered by the sources, for much of the ethnographic literature deals specifically with these two 'extremes' of Iban culture. Thus we have, on the one hand, Freeman's classic studies of the Balèh Iban, and on the other, the collective works of Sandin, Harrisson, and Sather, which are chiefly concerned with the Iban communities of the Saribas region.

Rather than weary the reader at this point with a protracted discussion of the numerous contributions that each individual author has made, I would refer them instead to the bibliography, which should at the same time provide a suitable introduction to the ethnographic literature as a whole. A special reference must be made, however, to the dictionaries of Howell & Bailey (1900), and Richards (1981), which together provide a

particularly rich source of information. Perham, Howell, Nyuak, Gomes, Sutlive and Uchibori should also be singled out for attention here as especially important contributors to the ethnographic record. As far as a critical assessment of these sources is concerned, my comment is reserved for those places in the following analysis where they may be directly related to the issues at hand.

To return then to the present question of cultural uniformity, the collective efforts of the authors cited above, together with many others too numerous to mention in passing, have provided us with a substantial body of literature on the subject of the Iban and their society as they have existed in differing parts of Sarawak at various moments in time over the past one hundred years or so. Accordingly, one finds that what this picture reveals is not so much a case of cultural divergence as one of elaboration. By this I mean that while there are undeniably certain cultural differences between the Iban of one area and those of another, these distinctions occur for the most part on the 'surface' so to speak, and can in this respect be understood as regional expressions, or 'interpretations', of an underlying logic that unites even the most divergent communities. Thus Sather writes of a "symbolic order" that is common to all Iban areas, but which is "refracted through the social system" according to the needs and demands of individual situations and circumstances (1977a: 169).

A good example of this is in the way in which the traditional rituals that accompany the cultivation of hill rice have been extended to embrace wet-rice farming (*sawah*) and the cultivation of pepper (*lada*) and rubber (*getah*) for a market economy (Sather 1980a: 69)⁶. Sather writes

that in the Paku region of the Saribas, where pepper and rubber cash crops have largely displaced traditional hill rice farming

"the cultivation of pepper and rubber... have assumed some of the same ritual associations traditionally connected with rice farming. Both, for example, are the subject of ritual festivals conducted by the bards, the *Gawai Lada* and the *Gawai Getah*, [and] [t]hese are modelled respectively on the more elaborated rice-farming festivals *Gawai Umai* and *Gawai Batu*" (Sather 1980a: 69).

In other words, although the introduction of pepper and rubber in the Saribas may be seen as a radical economic innovation these new measures have nonetheless been organized, and incorporated into Iban society, according to a traditional model of agricultural practices⁷.

But if the cultivation of rubber and pepper provides a good illustration of the way in which the exotic may be assimilated into a traditional framework, not all the often quite striking differences between Saribas and non-Saribas areas (see Freeman 1981: 7 ff.) can be so readily reduced to a transformation of existing ideas and values. Opinion differs as to the precise extent to which the Saribas diverge from their fellow Iban in other areas. Harrisson, for example, feels that "the Saribas Iban are just as 'typical' as any other Iban" (1968: 131). Richards, on the other hand, argues that "the Saribas Iban differ from the majority to such an extent that omission of ... references to the differences gives a distorted view" (1968: 132). He adds: "statements made about them [the Saribas Iban] or any other branch of the Iban community, are not necessarily true of all Iban" (Richards 1968: 132). Similarly, one finds that Jensen also distinguishes the Saribas Iban and their neighbours, the

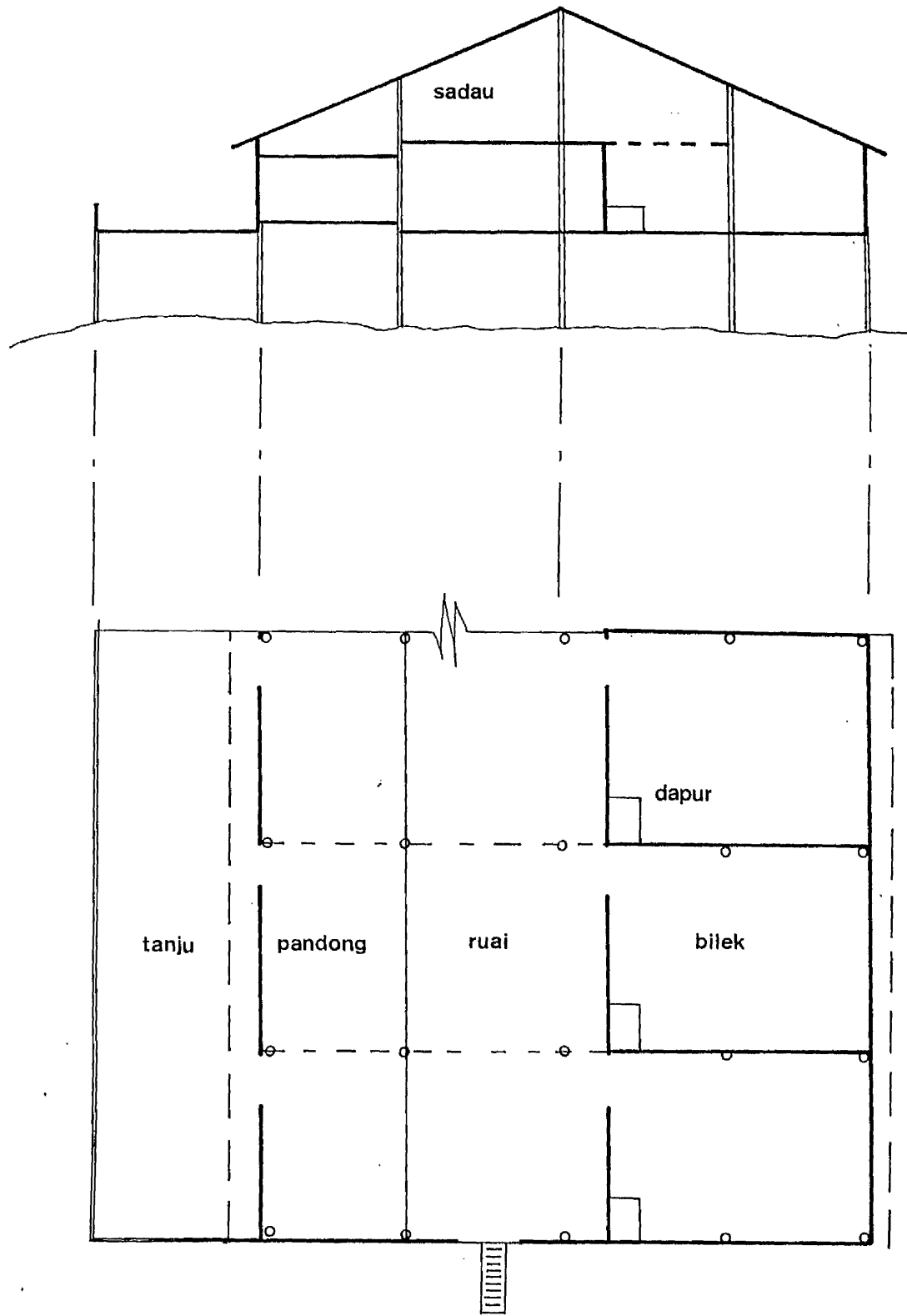
Krian, from other Iban 'tribes', in this particular instance on the basis of "the importance they attach to the *gawai antu* (feast of the dead)" which is "largely unknown" elsewhere (1974: 58). Uchibori, however, rejects this distinction, providing evidence to the contrary, and arguing that "virtually all the Iban populations perform *gawai antu* or its equivalent, the only exception being the communities of the upper Lupar" (n.d.: 33)⁸.

Clearly the 'problem' of the Saribas Iban is a somewhat controversial one. It need not, however, concern us unduly, just so long as one is aware of the possibility that we may be dealing with a certain degree of acculturation when examining material from this region. For this reason I have tried, as far as possible, to construct my arguments and conclusions around data that are drawn from other Iban areas and then corroborate these with the Saribas sources rather than the other way about. In other respects, however, I have treated the Iban ethnographic literature as a whole, although in many instances I have qualified particular statements with references to the region from which the data are drawn.

Iban society and the longhouse community

Iban society is essentially a 'village society', except that in this particular instance the village consists of a single residential structure, the longhouse. As Freeman remarks, "[a]nyone who has travelled in the interior of Borneo is familiar with the conspicuous shape of a long-house: an attenuated structure supported on innumerable hard-wood posts, it stretches for a hundred yards or more along the terraced bank of a river, its roof - of thatch, or wooden shingles - forming an unbroken expanse"

Figure 2



Plan & Section of an Iban Longhouse

(1970: 1). This domestic arrangement offers a number of practical advantages, among them, well-ventilated and dry accommodation; security from enemy attack; protection from wild animals; and convenient disposal of waste (which is simply dropped through the floor to be consumed by the community's pigs which are herded below). The fact that the entire community resides under but a single roof might also encourage speculation along the lines of some communal, or indeed communist, principle of social organization. This, however, is very far from being the case, for as Freeman is quick to point out, "For the Iban, at least, this inference is the reverse of true" (1970: 1). Instead, the longhouse community is composed of a number of autonomous, though interrelated, families, who reside side by side in adjacent apartments or *bilek* (see fig.2).

The members of a "*bilek*-family" (Freeman 1970: 9) are almost always intimately related by ties of consanguinity and affinity, although the adoption of children is common and the incorporation of individuals without families not unknown (Freeman 1970: 9). The primary criterion for membership, however, is one of residence or domicile rather than the nature of the kinship relations between individual members of the family. This means that in terms of rights, obligations and group loyalties, an individual belongs first and foremost to the *bilek*-family with whom he resides, regardless of where his parents or siblings are located. In this respect, the *bilek*-family may be regarded as a key component of Iban society; but, before pursuing this subject further, I would like first to discuss the extra-familial ties of cognatic kinship that draw the longhouse community and its neighbours together at a more general level of social organization.

The Iban kindred or *Kaban*

As far as kinship relations are concerned, Iban society provides a classic example of a cognatic social system (Uchibori n.d.: 2) and this is reflected in a bilateral system of kinship nomenclature (Freeman 1970: 66). Freeman writes: "ties of kinship are traced both through father and mother, and relationships of the same order, whether through males or females are of equal value" (1970: 66-67)². Marriage is permitted among any two individuals of the same generational level provided they are not siblings or co-residents of the same *bilek*. It is therefore perfectly permissible to marry cousins of any degree and from either side of the family.

To the extent that ties of kinship are recognized, each individual belongs to an extensive bilateral grouping which radiates outwards from an ego-focused centre. The Iban term for this group of "personal kindred" (Freeman 1970: 67), is *kaban* and this category includes any man or woman with whom it is possible to trace some kind of cognatic link no matter how remote or indeed accurate this may be. Clearly this group is not well defined - the links becoming more tenuous towards the periphery³ - while at a formal level the *kaban* has little significance in terms of group rights and obligations. It does, however, provide an informal mechanism for solidarity both within the longhouse community and also between neighbouring settlements.

The longhouse community is an open group in that its component *bilek*-families have a prescriptive right to choose their place of abode and thus are joined in a free association from which withdrawal is always possible (Freeman 1970: 104, 128)⁴. This freedom of choice is limited to

a certain extent, however, by the stipulation that in order to join a particular longhouse community the *bilek*-family must be able to trace some form of cognatic link - through at least one its members - with one or more *bilek*-families already in residence at the longhouse in question (Freeman 1970: 87, 98). This means that a *bilek*-family will always be related in one way or another to at least one other *bilek* in the longhouse¹², while a general preference for marriage within the kindred (*kaban*) (Freeman 1970: 73) means that these links are progressively reinforced over successive generations as marriages within the longhouse draw more and more people into a cognatic relationship with one another.

At the same time this preference for marriage within the *kaban* means that loose affinal alliances with neighbouring communities are constantly being reaffirmed and consolidated (Freeman 1970: 73)¹³.

Freeman writes:

"This results in clusters of kindred occupying adjacent sections of a river, and it is upon an inter-locking aggregation of kindreds, that the diffuse political structure of the Iban rests. Thus the various groupings which appear in accounts of Sarawak in the nineteenth century, such as the Skrang, the Lemanak, the Ulu Ai Dayaks, etc., were conglomerations of kindreds which formed the basis for a loose tribal organization. These tribes were all predominantly endogamous groupings, and although they possessed no rigid internal organization, the leaders that emerged were always able to claim the allegiance of their kinsmen, for within each tribe there existed strong feelings of solidarity based on innumerable ties of bilateral kinship" (1970: 73).

In this respect then, the principles of cognatic kinship and *kaban* membership act as a source of cohesion and solidarity in wider Iban society in much the same way that tribal affiliation draws together clans and lineages in a unilineal system of social organization. But while this

may play a crucial role in time of war, or in the peaceful settlement of disputes between communities (ie, because their members are interrelated through ties of kinship), as far as everyday affairs are concerned, the *kaban* is of relatively little importance while in no way can it be regarded as the source of any economic, jural or political rights and obligations.

The *bilek*-family

In the absence of unilateral descent groups such as lineages or clans it is, then, the *bilek*-family which constitutes the primary unit of Iban society. Membership is either from birth or else through recruitment by marriage, adoption or incorporation. No distinction, however, is made between natal, affinal, adoptive or incorporated members in that they all have equal rights of ownership and inheritance (Freeman 1970: 20 ff.; Jensen 1974: 34-35). Nor are family members distinguished on the basis of their age or sex, although the most senior member by virtue of his or her descent from the previous owners of the *bilek* is recognized as the 'foundation' of the *bilek* (*pun bilek*), and is acknowledged as the person from whom the rights of ownership and inheritance of all the other family members ultimately stems (Freeman 1970: 31).

Typically the ownership of the *bilek* apartment passes from parents to children¹⁴. It is rare, however, for married siblings to share the same *bilek*, and so the apartment usually passes to just one child and his or her spouse. The remaining brothers and sisters will then marry into other *bilek*-families or else establish a new *bilek* on their own. As will be evident from this last statement, marriage may be either virilocal or

uxorilocal (Freeman 1970: 23; Jensen 1974: 35-36)¹⁵, while there is no formal principle - such as the rule of primogeniture - to decide which individual in a group of siblings actually inherits the *bilek* in which they were born (Freeman 1970: 29).

As already mentioned, residence is the primary qualification for *bilek*-family membership, but the importance of this membership is more than simply a question of domicile. In the first place the *bilek*-family is an allodial unit possessing both land and property in its own right (Freeman 1970: 9). Each family has its own rice fields, usually acquired through being the first to fell a particular section of primary forest¹⁶, while most *bilek* will also possess sago plantations, wild or semi-wild fruit trees, rubber small-holdings, pigs and poultry (Jensen 1974: 42-43). In addition, each family will also own its own farming equipment, tools, weapons, utensils, dugout canoes and other essential items needed in everyday life (Freeman 1970: 30). The *bilek*-family is thus a self-sufficient unit economically, cultivating its own rice and cash crops independently of other families although a system of labour exchange (*bedurok*) may occasionally be employed in circumstances where a larger work force is required (Freeman 1970: 234; Richards 1981: 76).

This economic self-sufficiency is at the same time reflected in the autonomy of the *bilek*-family in other areas of Iban social life. Freeman tells us that "jurally each *bilek*-family is a power unto itself, managing its own affairs and acknowledging no other family to be its superior, or master" (Freeman 1970: 129). In this respect the "longhouse must be conceived of, not as a unified group, but rather as a territorial aggregation of discrete units; not as a communal pavilion, but as a street of privately owned, semi-detached houses" (Freeman 1970: 129).

These circumstances foster a climate of competitive rivalry between *bilek*-families which can be seen in the vigorous combined efforts of their members to acquire prestigious material wealth in the form of antique storage jars and Chinese ceramics; gongs, cannon and other brassware; gold and silver ornaments; jewellery and woven textiles. These family heirlooms are collectively owned and are displayed in the *bilek* apartment to be admired and envied by all. Each generation hopes to add to this treasury of "prestige property" (Jensen 1974: 41), and it is only circumstances of extreme poverty that will force a family to dispose of this non-productive wealth in exchange for rice and other necessities. The *bilek* is thus a source of pride and the focus of an individual's interest and group loyalty.

The autonomy and independence of the *bilek*-family is also evident at a ritual level in that for most purposes the family constitutes a discrete ritual unit. In this connection, each *bilek*-family has its own assortment of ritual items or equipment, and its own set of ceremonial procedures. Unlike prestige property, "ritual property" (Jensen 1974: 41) may never be sold but instead is handed down intact from one generation to another (Jensen 1974: 41). It consists of magical charms (*pengaruh*) - in particular those for cultivating rice; head trophies (*'antu pala'*); ceremonial attire; and various 'sacred' strains of rice (*padi pun* and *padi sangking*). Often these ritual items have been acquired through some mystical experience - such as the revelation of the whereabouts of a magical charm in a dream - and this lends them an added sanctity.

At the same time, each family has its own set of prohibitions and ritual procedures which complement the particular combination of magical charms that they possess. As Sather observes, the relationship between man and the gods is viewed in "highly personal terms" (1977a: 163), and each

family has its own individual prayers (*sampi*) and ritual paraphernalia, which may be changed as they see fit (Sather 1977a: 163). As a result each *bilek*-family has its own manner of ritual procedure and although this may be seen to conform to a more general logic of Iban ritual behaviour it nevertheless means that every *bilek*-family will possess a distinctive ritual character or identity.

In summary then, the *bilek*-family is an autonomous unit, self-sufficient in every respect, with its own land, property and ritual procedures. This conglomeration of rights, property and family tradition is collectively inherited and added to by each successive generation, and it is this common inheritance which serves to link current members of the *bilek* not only to their predecessors but also to those who are to follow them, so that the *bilek*-family takes on a transtemporal character, persisting through time in a continuous line of descent from a long-forgotten founder. In a constantly changing social universe, the *bilek*-family is, thus, an emblem of continuity and permanence.

Egalitarian social ideology

The *bilek*-family is, as we have seen "a social unit of primary and paramount importance" (Freeman 1970: 9). It is a discrete, autonomous and economically self-sufficient entity which owes no allegiance to any higher authority than that of its household head. Unlike the Kayan, Kenyah, pagan Melanau and several other Bornean peoples, the Iban are not divided into different social classes (Pringle 1970: 35). Nor is there any form of institutionalized leadership based upon hereditary succession¹⁷, or some

such other socially divisive principle (Freeman 1970: 105 ff.; 114n; 1981: 10 ff.). Instead one finds that

"Within the longhouse all *bilek-families* are at jural parity with one another. Differentiation in terms of wealth and influence there always is, institutionalized subordination there certainly is not. Jurally each *bilek-family* is a power unto itself, managing its own affairs and acknowledging no other family to be its superior, or master. Thus, while a longhouse is multipartite, it is without formal hierarchical, or hegemonic organization. Under Iban adat ['customary law' - see below] all men are equals. During his lifetime a man may acquire high prestige and become an honoured leader, but rank is not inheritable, and there is no institution of chieftainship. Iban society is classless and egalitarian - and its members, individualists, aggressive and proud in demeanour, lacking any taste for obeisance" (Freeman 1970: 129)¹⁸.

This egalitarian character of Iban society is well documented in the ethnographic literature (Sather 1977b: viii; 1978b: 340; Sutlive 1978: 3, 108-10; Uchibori 1978: 8), and has recently been re-affirmed by Freeman (1981) following speculative attempts to demonstrate that the Iban really possess a form of incipient social stratification not dissimilar to the tertiary class structure found among neighbouring Kayan peoples (Rousseau 1980). The lack of institutionalized rank and political authority does not mean however that the longhouse community exists in a state of virtual anarchy as some have imagined (Rousseau 1980: 52), or that Iban society is entirely without any form of direction or leadership. What it does mean is that Iban society has developed a highly competitive ethos in which individuals may only accede to positions of influence on the basis of their own reputation and prestige. This may be acquired through achievement in various fields of endeavour (see below), but as already mentioned, cannot be passed on from one generation to another. Instead, personal status must be

sought and won by the members of each successive generation in their turn. At any one moment in time, however, there will always be certain individuals who are in a position to lead or influence the course of events within the longhouse community. The informal authority of such persons may only be transitory, in that they may be superseded by others who are seen to be more worthy or who prove to be better leaders, but it is a very real political power nonetheless, and is much sought after by both men and women in their different ways.

The acquisition of prestige and social status

In Iban society, the subsistence economy traditionally has been based largely upon the cultivation of hill rice. Jensen writes that for the Iban, rice has for countless generations "meant the difference between eating and going hungry, between health and sickness, prosperity and deprivation, even life and death" (1974: 152). The outcome of the annual harvest is thus a matter of great importance to every member of the community, even in those areas - such as the Saribas - where rice farming has largely been abandoned in favour of more lucrative cash crops such as rubber and pepper. In short, rice farming plays a central role in the Iban way of life and it is perhaps not surprising, therefore, to find that much of Iban social and religious ideology is oriented towards the cultivation of hill rice.

Leaving aside the 'religious', or ritual, implications of Iban agriculture for the moment - they are considered in chapter 6 - one finds that a bountiful harvest is desirable, not just because it frees the *bilek*-family from the ignominy of having to borrow grain from friends and relatives during the coming year¹², but also because a surplus supply of

rice represents a source of 'capital' which can then be 'invested' in a number of ways so as to enhance the family's standing in society. For example, it allows the family to add to their *bilek* estate through the purchase of valuable and prestigious artefacts - such as the aforementioned antique storage jars and brass cannon and gongs - which will then be put on display in the *bilek* apartment, alongside existing family heirlooms (see p. 87). Perhaps more importantly, however, surplus rice stocks provide the family with the economic wherewithal to sponsor a prestigious festival, or *gawai*. This strategy is extremely rewarding in terms of the status and renown that accrues from the role of festival sponsor, and it is one that places the family (or families) concerned at the centre of community life, even if only for a brief period (ie. the duration of the festivities).

These festivals come in a number of different forms, and although some are ostensibly geared towards community interests - for example, the major ceremonies of the annual agricultural cycle - many are of a self-congratulatory nature, celebrating the deeds and accomplishments of their sponsors in a variety of fields of endeavour. In either instance, however, the simple fact of festival sponsorship is in itself regarded as a highly worthy action and it is the principal means by which personal successes and status are institutionalized and publicly acknowledged. Consequently a bountiful harvest is obviously of vital importance to the man or woman who wishes to elevate his or her position within the community, for without sufficient 'capital', in the form of surplus rice supplies, it would be impossible to arrange what is often an extremely expensive undertaking. In this respect, therefore, it will be apparent that those who would aspire to positions of influence in Iban society must first of all succeed as rice farmers and one finds that this essential economic precondition is then

subsequently sanctified and legitimized by the ritual or religious implications of agricultural success as will be described in chapter 6.

But if agricultural success is a prerequisite for success in more general terms, a man who would be leader must also be seen to have proved himself in other, more openly assertive pursuits. These include a number of traditionally manly roles or settings, many of which are related to trials of strength or daring. For example, the difficult and dangerous task of felling (*nebang*) the immense jungle trees of the virgin rain forest is an important cultural 'scenario' and provides a suitable "occasion for the demonstration of skill and daring, an opportunity for a young man to establish himself among his peers" (Freeman 1970: 173-4)²⁰. Similarly the task of carrying in the rice harvest from the often distant fields provides another opportunity for Iban men to establish a reputation for themselves in that "the ability to carry heavy loads across broken country is admired by the Iban as a leading masculine attribute" (Freeman 1970: 209), and those who excel in this activity often have laudatory nicknames (*julok*) bestowed upon them, reflecting their prowess in this respect (Freeman 70: 209)²¹.

But physical strength and daring are not in themselves enough in the competition for status and influence for a man must also have proved himself as an adventurer, - one who has travelled far and wide in strange lands - as institutionalized in the custom of *bejalai* (lit. 'to go on a journey'). For example, Freeman tells us that

"It is one of the most cherished customs of the Iban that men - and particularly young men - should periodically leave their long-houses and venture out into the world to seek their fortunes. These journeys, or *bejalai*, frequently last for several years on end, and often extend to the remotest corner of Borneo, and even to Malaya and

the islands of Indonesia. They have two main aims: the acquisition of valuable property and of social prestige. For most young men these journeys are an overruling passion, and, as a result, they do not settle down to domestic life until a good deal later than would otherwise be the case" (1970: 24-25).

The property that Freeman refers to here of course consists of ceramics, brassware and other prestigious items that can be purchased with the fruits of wage-labour in the oil fields of Brunei or the timber camps of Sabah, and as Freeman observes, "when men go on journeys they are expected to return home with valuables of some kind, and their social prestige is enhanced if they are regularly successful in their quests" (1970: 226).

But as important as *bejalai* is in a modern context, traditionally, and even in the recent past, it was the domain of warfare and headhunting which, above all else, was the chief source of male prestige and social status (Howell 1977: 30; Gomes 1911: 73; Freeman 1970: 113; 1975: 277-78, 280; 1979: 238-42; Morgan 1968: 148; Sandin 1970: 89; 1977: 11-13; Sather 1977b: viii; 1978b: 340; 1980b: xi). Freeman writes

"Among the Iban ... the head of an enemy was, beyond all compare, the most highly valued of trophies, being regarded as a *tanda brani*, or sign of fighting prowess. It was by taking a head, above all else, that a man acquired prestige among his fellows. As the Iban phrase it: '*Sapa enda brani, enda bulih antu pala, enda brita*', 'Those who are not daring, who do not take heads, lack renown'. (1979: 238).

Achievement in warfare could be acknowledged in several ways. In the first place, those who had taken heads were automatically eligible to sponsor a celebratory *gawai*, selected, as appropriate, from a series, or cycle, of headhunting festivals arranged in ascending order of importance.

Quite apart from the ritual, or 'religious' significance of these ceremonies (see below), and the merit attached to their sponsorship in this respect, such occasions also made known the valiant deeds of their sponsors and publically proclaimed their virtues in this connection.

At the same time such men were in a position to have the back of their hands tattooed (Freeman 1979: 238) - a constantly displayed reminder of their bravery and prowess on the field of battle. On ceremonial occasions they would be seated in places of honour, while at the *gawai antu* festival, held in commemoration of the community's dead, leading warriors would participate in the drinking of libations to the memory of former heroes (Sandin 1961: 170-1; 1963: 321-322, 325; Perham 1884: 298; Uchibori n.d.: 29-30). Furthermore, those men who had taken heads were sure of receiving the adulation of women and were much sought after as husbands (Freeman 1979: 238). Most important of all, however, was the fact that those who were regularly successful in bringing back the heads of the enemy were then able, through their reputation, to secure a circle of 'followers' - *anembiak* - who would support them, not only in times of war, but also in the decisions concerning the everyday life of the community. In short, success in warfare and headhunting brought with it the possibility of success in other areas of Iban society.

To summarize briefly, Iban notions of prestige and social status can be understood in terms of an egalitarian ideal, cross-cut by a highly competitive ethos. The latter finds its expression in any number of different ways, but in the past was particularly linked to the cultivation of rice and the taking of enemy heads in battle. In other words rank and influence in traditional Iban society were inseparable from agricultural success and prowess in warfare, and this was reflected in the title given

to such men who were known as *raja brani* - literally, 'rich and brave'. In this respect, agriculture and headhunting were, and to a certain extent still remain, the two most prominent features of Iban culture, at least as far as the Iban themselves are concerned.

Longhouse elders and Iban *adat*

Discussion of status and leadership brings us to the issue of social regulation and the maintenance of order within Iban society. The *bilek*-family is, as we have seen, a discrete and autonomous entity; but despite this well-attested independence, each family must nevertheless adhere to an extensive set of injunctions and prohibitions that constitute Iban 'customary law' or *adat* (Sandin 1980). Sather writes:

"The prime function of *adat* is to assure harmonious relations among community members. At the same time, conduct in accordance with *adat* was traditionally believed to maintain a community in a state of ritual well-being with respect to the gods and spirits. Any serious breach of *adat* threatens this relationship and is dealt with accordingly, not only by secular means, but ... often by supernatural sanctions or forms of ritual propitiation as well" (1980b: xi).

In traditional Iban society breaches of *adat* were put before an *ad hoc* group of elders "who were recognized as having a sufficient knowledge of *adat* to mediate in the settlement of disputes within the community" (Freeman 1981: 34). The position of elder (*tuai*) was not determined by any institutionalized means but instead rested upon the personal qualities and reputation of an individual and in particular his

ability to speak well - i.e., his ability to present all aspects of a case in a clear and impartial manner. Freeman writes that

"While their [the *tuai*] views on other issues of moment would be duly listened to, they were primarily mediators and custodians of the *adat* law; their authority was essentially personal. Again, the position of *tuai* was not hereditary; instead, men were *chosen* by their peers for their individual abilities. As the Iban themselves put it: 'Whoever "knows words" was selected by the community as a mediator' (*Sapa nemu jako, ngambi orang nyadi tuai*)" (1981: 34-35; emphasis in the text)²².

The imposition of European rule, however, substantially altered the character of this informal and acephalous system of social control for it was the policy of the Brooke Raj to appoint one of these senior elders as longhouse headman or *tuai rumah*, whose duty it was to liaise between his community and the government. This officially sanctioned investiture of authority directly contravened the traditional pattern of Iban political 'power' or influence whereby a man became a leader, "not by prescript, but by demonstrating his prowess in the flesh and then being *chosen* by his peers" (Freeman 1981: 38; emphasis in text). Nevertheless, the fact that the *tuai rumah* was selected from the group of community elders meant, however, that he was usually a suitable candidate for this externally imposed office, while attempts to introduce a system of primogeniture 'chieftainship' were firmly resisted by the Iban, and not the least by those who stood to gain by this innovation (Freeman 1981: 55-56 n.26)²³.

In 1949 the selection procedures for *tuai rumah* were significantly modified when it was decided to allow longhouse communities to choose their own leaders rather than having this decision made for them by government officials or district officers (Freeman 1981: 20-21). This present

situation is evidently much more in keeping with the traditional values of Iban political ideology. Accordingly one finds that the *tuai rumah* is, ideally,

"a man of good appearance and address, who has attained prestige without sacrificing popularity ... [H]e should have those qualities of self-reliance and resolution which are the prerequisites of any leader. But, perhaps, most important of all are a sound knowledge of *adat*, impartiality, good powers of judgement in handling disputes, and an ability to use words" (Freeman 1970: 111)

In this respect it is interesting to note that while the legal powers of the *tuai rumah* to arbitrate in disputes are nowadays ultimately sanctioned by the government, Freeman comments that "despite the changes which have occurred, his authority, within the long-house, is still circumscribed" (1970: 111). Thus he writes:

"Under Iban *adat* a *tuai rumah* has no authority to command other members of the community, nor are they, in any marked sense, his personal subordinates. Were a *tuai rumah* so rash as to issue commands to others, he would at once be rebuffed, and sharply. Rather, such influence as he does exert is by a subtle mixture of persuasion and admonition, for he knows that his position is dependent on the continued goodwill and approval of his *anembiak*, as the other members of the house are called" (1970: 113).

That is to say, should the *tuai rumah* fail to administer his duties properly, or in some other way incur the disapproval of his followers, then he is removed from office and another elder is chosen in his place (Freeman

1970: 114). This removal is effected quite simply by a transference of recognition from one man to another. Freeman remembers:

"enquiring of the Iban what would happen if a *tuai rumah* refused to be rejected. Their scornful comment on this contingency sums up the general attitude to a *tuai rumah*'s authority with great nicety: 'Wherein would lie his power, he belongs to but one *bilek-family*' ('*Dini iya depat, se pintu aja*')" (Freeman 1970: 114)).

From this remark one might deduce that even in contemporary Iban society, the formal authority of the *tuai rumah* is more in the eyes of the Sarawak government than in those of his fellow members of the longhouse community²⁴.

Pun Rumah

Iban society, as we have seen, is characterized by the complete absence of any form of institutionalized political leadership such as chieftainship - the nominal position of the *tuai rumah* aside (Freeman 1970: 114n). There is, however, a single man to whom the community regularly turns for direction and advice, and this is the *pun rumah*. The title means the 'origin', 'foundation' or 'basis' (*pun*) of the longhouse (*rumah*), and the incumbent is primarily responsible for maintaining good relationships between the community and the supernatural world of the gods and spirits (see below). In this respect his duties often coincide with those of the elders (*tuai*) as custodians of the *adat*, for as already mentioned, the authority of the *adat* is to a large extent supported by supernatural sanctions. In other respects, however, the role of the *pun rumah* was, and

still is, clearly distinguished from the collective responsibilities of the longhouse *tuai*: whereas the latter are first and foremost mediators in secular disputes and upholders of the *adat* law, the *pun rumah* is primarily a ritual specialist.

To elaborate, although most ritual contexts can be seen to reflect the autonomy and independence of the *bilek*-family, each *bilek* is nevertheless part of a wider 'congregation' - that of the longhouse community as a whole - in which the welfare of all is conjoined (Freeman 1970: 122). So, while each family possesses its own set of charms, prayers and ritual procedures, and in many cases can be regarded as a discrete ritual entity, at another level of organization the individual families of the longhouse are gathered together as members of a single ritual community (Sather 1980b: xxi).

The Iban distinguish between two ritual states of being - *angat* and *celap*. *Angat*, on the one hand, refers to a 'hot' or 'feverish' condition, with generally inauspicious connotations; while *celap*, on the other, is 'cool' or 'tranquil' and generally indicates a favourable state of well-being and auspiciousness (Freeman 1970: 122; Jensen 1974: 26, 110, 113-15; Uchibori 1978: 32; Richards 1981: 11, 63). These terms can be applied to a number of different situations or contexts including the collective ritual state of the longhouse community (Freeman 1970: 122). In this connection, the *pun rumah* is an individual who possesses certain charms - *pencalap rumah* - which enable him to maintain the longhouse in a 'cool' state of ritual harmony (Freeman 1970: 120; 1961: 162; 1981: 32-33).

At the same time, the *pun rumah* must also be able to perform the major communal rites of Iban religion on behalf of his fellow longhouse residents - a task which can be directly related to his supposed ability to communicate with the gods and other denizens of Iban supernature. In this

connection the *pun rumah* must be skilled at interpreting bird omens (*burong* - lit. 'bird') and dreams (*mimpi*), and also in divination by hepatomancy - in this instance, the reading of pig's livers (Freeman 1970: 120-121; 1961: 161-2; 1981: 33; Jensen 1974: 60-61). It is this role of community augur which gives the *pun rumah* his alternative title of *tuai burong* ('bird elder'), although not all *tuai burong* are necessarily *pun rumah*.

As might be imagined, the combination of these abilities and attributes made the *pun rumah* (or *tuai burong*) a most important individual in Iban eyes and it is this high regard which is reflected in his designation as the 'foundation' (*pun*) of the longhouse for it would naturally be impossible to establish a new community without the services of such a man²⁵. Often his ability to attract and interpret omens and dreams means that the *pun rumah*, in his capacity of *tuai burong* or community augur, is also the leader of migration (*pun pindah*)²⁶ (Jensen 1974: 61; Freeman 1981: 35) while in the past, before the pacification of Sarawak, this latter role frequently required that the *pun rumah/pun pindah* should also be a great war leader as well (*pun ngayau*) (Freeman 1981: 59 n 46). Thus a number of different, though related, roles may coincide in the 'office' of *pun rumah*.

This brings us to the very heart of Iban concepts of leadership and authority: on the one hand, prestige and political influence is derived from a combination of wealth, achievement and personality; on the other, this acquired status is underwritten by the idea that successful men are favoured by the gods and spirits. Thus the *pun rumah* ultimately derives his support from his supposed communication with beneficent deities, for as Jensen has observed:

"The *tuai burong* is the augur, but he is not merely an augury expert. He is, above all, favoured with the spirit attention which expresses itself regularly in omens and dreams. As omens and dreams are open to interpretation, the *tuai burong* has not only to receive regular spirit guidance in this manner but to be capable of interpreting it. The proof of his correct interpretation is assumed to lie in the success of his own undertakings in particular and in the well-being of his longhouse community generally" (1974: 60).

The notion of supernatural favour is also evident in the idea of a guardian spirit or helper (*antu nulong/antu ngarong*). For example, Freeman tells us that

"Almost every renowned head-hunter of former days was aided by a dream-derived spirit helper. The most wished for of all these spirit helpers was the *nabau*, a mythical serpent, or water dragon, which was believed to accompany the head-hunter, aiding him in his gruesomely heroic task" (1979: 240; see also Freeman 1975: 285; & 1981: 60 n48).

Similarly Perham writes that

"if a Dyak invariably gets a good harvest of padi, it is by the magic charm, the '*ubat*', of some favouring spirit: if he has attained to the position of a war leader, or been markedly brave, it is by the communion or touch of some power: and in fact every successful man in Dyak life is credited by his fellows with the succour of one of these beings of the mystical world" (1882:218).

Not everyone, however, is so fortunate as to be favoured by the attentions of a spirit helper and so, for this reason, individuals may actually solicit a supernatural encounter by holding a nocturnal vigil (*nampok*) at some lonely spot where spirits (*antu* - see below) are thought

to reside - for example, a mountain top, a cemetery (*pendam*), a deep pool, or the foot of a fig tree (*kara*)²⁷ (Perham 1882: 219; Howell 1977: 157-158; Nyuak 1977: 198-200; Gomes 1911: 204-5; Jensen 1974: 122; Richards 1981: 225-26). Such encounters with supernatural beings - who are said to adopt a number of terrifying or threatening aspects before revealing their true nature - are thought to be extremely hazardous, for if abandoned through fear they may lead to madness and death (Howell 1977: 158; Gomes 1911: 204-5; Jensen 1974: 123-4; Richards 1981: 225-6). The rewards of a successful vigil, however, are great for they commonly result in the revelation of the whereabouts of a magical charm (*pengaruh*) which will enable its possessor to succeed in one or another pursuits²⁸.

Regular success then, be it in the realm of agriculture, warfare or whatever, is seen as an indication that the individual concerned is favoured by the gods and spirits. Such men are known as *raja brani* ('rich and brave'; see pp. 94-95) and it is from their ranks that Iban leaders emerge for they are natural candidates for influential roles such as *tuai*, *pun rumah*, *pun pindah*, or *pun ngayau* (see above). Thus as Jensen remarks in connection with the candidacy for the position of *tuai burong*, "[t]he essential qualification is success, success in rice farming" (1974: 60). He adds:

"Consequently, when the community seeks a new *tuai burong* to lead the community, it is customary to seek among those who are regularly successful (*ni orang ti sebak bulih dia nanya*). When a *tuai burong* has been provisionally selected by the community as a whole, it is expected that his appointment will be confirmed to him in a dream. Should the spirits fail to give their approval in this way, the provisional *tuai burong* does not qualify to take office and it becomes necessary to consider an alternative candidate" (1974: 60).

In other words, although the ability of Iban leaders to gather followers (*anembiak*) around them is essentially the result of a combination of personal charisma and achievement, for the Iban it is also linked to the notion of supernatural approval.

This idea of divine favour is thus the ultimate sanction, or legitimization, of political authority in Iban society and in many respects it is analogous to the Protestant ethic in our own culture, in that those who are wealthy and valiant - *raja brani* - are so because they have found the approval of the gods. These ideas are fundamental to understanding not only Iban notions of authority and leadership, but also many aspects of Iban 'religious' thought and feeling. This will emerge in the course of my analysis, particularly in connection with Iban attitudes and responses to the mystical or ritual implications of success in agriculture and warfare. At this present point, however, I would like to shift from what has been largely a male-focussed account of Iban social ideology, to consider instead the place of women in a society which, at first sight, would appear to be very much oriented towards the achievements of men.

The place of women in Iban society

It is important to have a clear understanding of the place of women in Iban society, not simply because sexual politics are in vogue or as a token gesture to the anthropology of women, but because the definition of gender and the relationship between men and women plays a crucial role in my analysis of Iban collective representations. If, up until now, I have hardly mentioned women, it is because I have concentrated on the more conventional dimensions of anthropological inquiry, namely the public and

political domains of society which tend to be male dominated. These areas of interest are very much the focus of attention for both the Iban and the ethnographer alike, but in the course of my analysis I shall argue that such issues can only be properly understood when viewed in the light of a world view, or cultural paradigm, in which the idea of woman and the concept of female gender is as important as the notion of the heroic male and the idealization of masculine attributes. It is with this in mind, therefore, that I now present some preliminary observations as regards the Iban attitudes towards gender distinctions.

Sather comments that the principle of sexual equality is very significant in Iban society (1978b: 340). This is evident in the bilateral social structure; the "utrolateral" (Freeman 1970: 14) residence pattern; the distribution of rights and obligations; and the importance given to the opinion of women in decision-making (Freeman 1970: 14; Komanyi 1973). As Gomes observes, "the Dyak woman does not hold an inferior or humiliating position" (1911: 86).

However, despite the extension of Iban egalitarian ideals to the relationship between the sexes, there nevertheless remains one important area of Iban society and culture from which women are entirely excluded and this is the enormously prestigious domain of warfare (Sather 1978b: 340). This exclusion had a very fundamental influence upon gender relations for as Sather observes:

"From their display of skill and leadership in warfare, men alone derived the highest honors and achieved positions of status and power in Iban society, further symbolized by praise-names and ritual distinctions, from which women, as a sex, were totally excluded. Warfare as an institution and its attendant glorification of male aggressiveness thus directly conflicted with the principles of sexual

equality and egalitarianism otherwise inherent in traditional Iban social structure" (1978b: 343)

In other words, although women have traditionally played an important role in Iban social life and, as we shall presently see (ch. 7), take on the major responsibility for the success of the annual rice harvest, their past exclusion from the male institution of headhunting has meant that Iban women have been, from the outset, seriously disadvantaged in terms of their collective status as a sex vis à vis that of men.

To a certain extent this disadvantage is offset by the prestigious nature of weaving and dyeing which were, and indeed still are, highly regarded, and are seen as being quintessentially feminine activities. Those women who are skilled as weavers and experts in the application of mordants, are identified, both ritually and in Iban oral literature, as the female equivalent of great war leaders. This theme is particularly well expressed in the tales of the legendary headhunting heroes of Panggau Libau (see pp. 119-121) who marry the women weavers of Gellong (Sandin 1977: 186). In this context, then, individual women, through their expertise at weaving and dyeing, can acquire personal status and prestige in much the same way that men were able to elevate their position in traditional Iban society by their achievements as headhunters. There are even one or two instances where a woman has been chosen as the *tuai rumah* of a longhouse (Freeman 1970: 85 nl; Komanyi 1973: 88). Nevertheless, as a general rule, Iban women are not able to compete with men on entirely equal terms and invariably must settle for a less influential role in society despite the jural and economic parity of the two sexes. In short, while traditionally the two sexes have been treated as equal in almost every aspect of Iban

social life, it was the institution of headhunting which, in the past, ultimately placed Iban men in ascendancy over women.

Summary of Iban society and social organization

At the most general level the Iban are gathered together in loose 'tribal' groupings consisting of a number of allied longhouse communities - usually those that are situated along the banks of a major river and its tributaries. Individual longhouses within each 'tribe' are joined through inter-marriage and bilateral ties of kinship but there is no formal structure or organization underlying this unity. Thus it is the *bilek*-family which forms the principal unit of Iban social organization and which constitutes the focus of an individual's loyalty, interest and affection.

The *bilek*-family is a numerically small and genealogically simple residential and domestic group or household. Such family constitutes an autonomous, economically self-sufficient, allodial unit, which persists through time as a discrete entity, passing from one generation of owners to the next. As far as inter-*bilek* relations are concerned, within the longhouse there is no formal system of hierarchy or social stratification, while jurally each *bilek*-family is a law unto itself. As Freeman remarks:

"At bottom ... a long-house consists of a federation of independent families, whose privately owned apartments have been built side by side to produce a single, attenuated structure. An appreciation of this basic fact is imperative to the proper understanding of Iban social organization" (1970: 128-9)

But although each *bilek* family is its own master, its members must nevertheless acknowledge and abide by the edicts and prohibitions of Iban customary law or *adat*. In the absence of any formal system of political authority, the *adat* provides Iban society with a means of social regulation. It is underwritten by a combination of supernatural sanction and the notion that ritually the longhouse constitutes a single community whose 'cool' (*celap*) and harmonious relationship with the supernatural realm can only be maintained by strict observance of the *adat* code. Accordingly, the informal authority of community elders (*tuai*) is derived, not from any institutionalized power, but instead is directly related to their command of the *adat* and their skill in applying this knowledge to the settlement of disputes and the taking of decisions.

Leadership in other areas of Iban society is similarly linked to a combination of ability and personal charisma, which allows an individual to build up a circle of *anembiak*, or followers. This capacity to lead must, however, be visibly demonstrated by repeated success in various fields of endeavour. In more recent times, *bejalai* expeditions have been a major source of male prestige, while recognition in the arts of weaving and dyeing have always been the main focus of female aspirations. Traditionally, however, it was the domains of agriculture and headhunting which provided the principal routes to honour and social status in Iban society, and regular success in both these fields was seen, and in the case of rice farming still is seen, as an essential qualification for those who would aspire to positions of influence within the community. This means that Iban society was, and to this day remains, extremely competitive, despite its egalitarian social ideology. In this respect, therefore, Iban society can be properly described as a meritocracy in that prestige and

social status can only be acquired by individuals on the basis of their own achievements in their life time and cannot be passed on from one generation to the next.

These, then, are some of the more prominent features of Iban society: an acephalous meritocracy, bound together as a ritual community, but otherwise fragmented into autonomous *bilek*-families which interact with one another in an egalitarian but highly competitive social milieu.

Iban religion: introduction

Iban religious ideology imposes itself upon the everyday existence of the Iban to a very large extent; so much so that almost every aspect of Iban daily life is open to some form of mystical interpretation. That this is so is largely due to the Iban conception of a coincidence between the phenomenal world of mankind and the metaphysical realm of the gods, demons, sprites, tutelary spirits, legendary heroes and other supernatural beings that go to make up the Iban pantheon. Thus one finds that while the major deities (*petara*) and many of the lesser figures each inhabit a particular realm or dominion, these mythical regions are not seen as being entirely separate or removed from the world of men.

Something of the Iban attitude towards supernature and its inhabitants is revealed in their use of the term *menoa* to describe these transempirical domains. *Menoa* is used indiscriminately to refer, on the one hand, to a district or location in the mundane, everyday world of experience - as, for example, in describing the area of land collectively held and used by a longhouse community (Jensen 1974: 105; Richards 1981: 215) - while, on the other, it may be equally applied to the various departments and regions

of the supernatural universe inhabited by the gods, spirits, and heroes. As Jensen observes, "sometimes it is not possible to draw a hard and fast line between the two [usages]" (1974: 105): often one finds that spirits (*antu*) which possess their own mythical domain are at the same time thought to inhabit real areas of jungle (Jensen 1974: 105), while many of the legendary exploits of the heroes of Panggau Libau are said to have taken place at real geographical locations (Jensen 1974: 105; Richards 1981: 378-79).

For the Iban then, the boundary between the real and the mystical is not rigidly defined - it is more a question of levels of experience. That is to say, while the gods, spirits and other denizens of supernature are not normally perceived in the course of daily life, at night they may be encountered in dreams which are interpreted as the experience of another level of existence. Thus one finds that dreams are often cited as evidence of the mystical dimension of Iban cosmology, while the frequent encounters with gods, spirits, heroes and so forth that take place on such occasions are seen as confirmation of the principal tenets of Iban mythology and religious ideology.

The major deities

In the past, Iban society, as we have seen, was largely preoccupied with two principal concerns, or activities. One was the cultivation of rice, and the other was the taking of enemy heads in war. Success in both these spheres was regarded as an essential prerequisite for the attainment of social status and political influence and the importance of these two activities in relation to the traditional Iban way of life is reflected in Iban religious ideology.

By far the most prominent of Iban deities are the two gods Pulang Gana and Lang Sengalang Burong. The former is the paramount god of agriculture, while the latter is the Iban god of war. They are, in fact, brothers, but they inhabit different cosmological zones. Thus Pulang Gana, in a manner befitting the principle deity of cultivation, resides in a subterranean realm which is said to be situated beneath the Giling Chiping mountain range (Jensen 1974: 81); while Lang Sengalang Burong inhabits the skies (*langit*) together with his sons-in-law, who are the major omen birds of Iban augury.

Much of Iban religious ideology is set out in mythological accounts of the exploits of the gods, for as Jensen observes, "the major myths all culminate in a description of one (or more) aspects of Iban social, religious, or cult practice" (1974: 71). In this respect the myths in which Pulang Gana appears (see Perham 1881: 146-7; Gomes 1911: 300-15; Harrisson 1965: 36-37; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 261-62; Jensen 1974: 78-81; Sutlive 1978: 100; Richards 1981: 288-89) serve to establish his role as the primary god of Iban agriculture, while those featuring Lang Sengalang Burong describe his importance in relation to the institution of headhunting and other areas of Iban social and religious ideology (see Perham 1882: 237-40; Howell 1977: 125-28; Gomes 1911: 278-300; Richards 1972: 66-67; 1981: 357-58; Jensen 1974: 84-90; Sandin 1980: 98-103).

Freeman describes Pulang Gana as a "god of fertility" (1970: 154; 189n; 301), but more precisely he is the owner of the soil or earth, which was given to him by his father-in-law Raja Samerugah (Harrisson 1965: 37; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 261; Sandin 1967b: 249-50; Jensen 1974: 42, 80, 81; Richards 1981: 288). For this reason he is always invoked in situations which involve a disturbance of the earth - for example, when

laying the foundations of a new longhouse (Brooke-Low 1892: 31; Howell 1977: 33-4; Gomes 1911: 48; Jensen 1974: 81; Richards 1981: 288), or when digging graves (Holland in Ling Roth 1896 I: 139; Howell 1977: 69; Gomes 1911: 136-7; Jensen 1974: 81) - and it is in this capacity that he has the power to make the land productive and bring forth good harvests. Conversely, he is also able to frustrate the attempts of those who try to cultivate the soil without his permission, and one therefore finds that one of the principal aims of the inaugural rites of the farming season is to supplicate Pulang Gana and compensate him for the use of the land (Jensen 1974: 80; Sather 1980b: xix). At the same time, Pulang Gana is also conceived as a provider of various magical charms (*pengaruh* or *ubat*) which are considered to be vital in encouraging the growth and fertility of the rice crop. In addition, he may be called upon to perform a number of other crucial services on behalf of the Iban farmer, such as the consecration of ritual whetstones (*batu pemanggol*), or the removal of pestilence from the fields. Consequently, one finds that Pulang Gana is invariably invoked at any ritual occasion to do with the cultivation of rice.

But important as Pulang Gana is in his own right he is nevertheless overshadowed by his brother Lang Sengalang Burong (usually referred to as 'Lang'), the Iban god of war. Freeman describes Lang as

"an amalgam of Jupiter and Mars, with a dash of Bacchus. In his human form he is an imposing man of heroic proportions, who, despite his mature age, is in full command of his great physical powers. His animal form is the Brahminy Kite: a predatory bird of great strength and beauty. Above all else Lang is the god of head-hunting: the custodian of severed heads from the beginning of time" (1979: 239).

In this last respect he is therefore always called upon by the Iban to assist them in warfare and he is regularly honoured at head-hunting ceremonies.

Lang, however, is much more than simply the Iban god of war; he is also the ultimate source of Iban *adat*, and in this respect is responsible for the ethnogenesis of the Iban as a people. This aspect of Lang's divine character is again revealed in the Iban mythology, and in particular, in the stories that tell of the great culture hero Surong Gunting. Briefly, these refer back to a time when the Iban lived in a very primitive state, much as the nomadic Punan of today, ignorant of agriculture, headhunting, augury, and the proper code of ritual and social behaviour. Over time, it seems that they gradually developed a more advanced way of life which ultimately included the cultivation of rice. Nevertheless, even with this increasing sophistication, Iban existence was never at all secure, and their way of life was constantly threatened with extinction. There was among them, however, one who unbeknown to them, was the son of one of the daughters of Lang Sengalang Burong. His mother's name was Endu Dara Tinchin Temaga, who had at one time been married to a great Iban chief, variously known as Siu, Menggin, Garai, Jelian or Meluda. This marriage had only lasted a short time and Tichin Temaga had soon returned to her real home in the sky realm or *langit*, leaving behind her husband and young son. The latter - Surong Gunting by name - was desolate at the strange and sudden departure of his mother and so he set out with his father to go and look for her. After several day's journey, and having crossed a great sea, the pair found themselves at the longhouse of Lang, where, having undergone numerous ordeals to prove his identity, Surong Gunting was welcomed by Lang as his grand-son and both he and his father invited to make themselves at home.

The two men accepted this invitation and eventually ended up staying with their supernatural hosts for a whole year, during which time Surong Gunting was taught how to cultivate rice and wage war in the correct manner. He was also instructed by his grandfather in the art of augury and in the proper mode of social and ritual conduct in every sphere of life. Then, when the year was up²⁹ and with the knowledge of the *adat* fully revealed, Surong Gunting - half man , half god - and his father, returned to their former home in the world of men, and in this way, they introduced the teachings of Lang Sengalang Burong to the Iban people. Since that time, the Iban have closely followed the *adat* of Lang, and the advantages that have ensued from doing so are clearly evident in the historical successes of the Iban people since their first entry into Sarawak some four hundred years ago .

In summary then, the Iban mythology reveals Lang Sengalang Burong to be, not only a god of warfare and headhunting, but also the ultimate source of Iban culture. Indeed, his position as the grandfather of Surong Gunting means that he is, in fact, a most illustrious ancestor of the Iban people, and many of the lengthy genealogies of the Saribas region - including that of the ethnographer Bendict Sandin - are concerned with tracing a direct line of descent from Lang (Sandin 1967a: 114, 118-9). But whatever the importance of Lang as the teacher of the *adat* and 'father' of the Iban way of life, it should be emphasized that it is as the god of war that Lang features most prominently in Iban mythology and religious ideology, reflecting the very great significance that was traditionally attached to headhunting as a ritual activity.

Pulang Gana and Lang are described as brothers, and several other major figures of the Iban pantheon are also linked by kinship relations to these two central characters. These include three other brothers, Selampandai, Anda Mara, and Menjaya Manang Raja, and their sister Ini Andan. Each of these has a particular role or responsibility in relation to Iban culture and in ritual performances they are called upon to assist the Iban in the endeavours with which they are especially associated. Rather than weary the reader with a welter of ethnographic detail I shall introduce these deities in the chapters which follow whenever they appear relevant to the general discussion. Further information concerning these and other deities can also be found in appendix A which provides a brief 'biography' of the various supernatural beings that appear in the text.

Before leaving the subject of Iban gods or *petara*, mention must be made, however, of the sons-in-law of Lang. Their names are given as Ketupong, Beragai, Pangkas, Embuas, Papau, Bejampong, Nendak, and Burong Malam, and while it would appear that Nendak and Burong Malam are not always recognized as being married to daughters of Lang these deities are all described as living in (or near) the longhouse of Lang, regardless of their marital status.

These gods have a special significance for the Iban for although most Iban deities are normally conceived in an anthropomorphic light, the sons-in-law of Lang are said to be able to take on an avian form in order to communicate their superior insight and advice to mankind. In other words, they are the principal participants in a system of augury which is extensively used by the Iban in the ordering of their daily lives³⁰.

The actual corporeal manifestation that the omen-birds assume is as follows:

Ketupong (Rufous Piculet): *Sasia abnormis*
 Beragai (Scarlet-rumped Trogon): *Harpactes duvauceli*
 Pangkas (Maroon Woodpecker): *Blythipicus rubiginosus*
 Embuas (Banded Kingfisher): *Lacedo pulchella*, Horsfield.
 Papau (Diard's Trogon): *Harpactes diardi*
 Bejampong (Crested Jay): *Platylophus galericulatus* Cuvier
 Nendak (White-rumped Shama): *Copsychus malabaricus*³¹
 Burong Malam (a species of cricket): *Cryllacris nigrilabris*³²

Each bird has a particular set of characteristics or qualities which are then interpreted according to the circumstances in which it is seen or heard and the direction of its call or path of flight - i.e., whether it be from the right or left, or from in front or behind (for further details see Freeman 1961; Metcalf 1976). Freeman tells us that according to the Iban, the omen-birds "never reveal themselves without cause, they always have something to tell us (*enda kala bamunyi diri, enda tau enda bisi utai di padah*) (1961: 147). He adds:

"The augural gods, it is believed are all-knowing (*nemu magang burong*) and able to foretell the future; furthermore, whenever they do intervene in human affairs it is always for man's advantage. This brings us to a cardinal feature of Iban augury. The augural birds, it is important to realize, are benign creatures, favourably disposed towards men (*nadai jai ati enggau Iban*); their *raison d'être* is to help and not to hinder; to confirm men in enterprises that are likely to succeed, to forewarn them of action and intentions likely to end hurtfully in failure or disaster" (1961: 147).

In this respect, Iban augury reveals a more general Iban attitude as regards their relationship with the gods. That is to say, Iban deities are seen as essentially benevolent beings who are able to assist mankind, rather than as authoritarian custodians of a moral order, sitting in judgement and waiting to exercise powers of retaliation for any infringement of this code. So, although *adat* can be said to relate to an 'order' of sorts, it is not one that is upheld by the gods, despite the fact that transgressions of this order may in fact disturb the relationship between man and his potential benefactors. Indeed the gods themselves are said to be subject to their own *adat* (Sather 1980b: xxx). In this respect Jensen's description of Iban *adat* as a "divine cosmic order" (Jensen 1974: 112, citing Schärer 1963: 74-75; my emphasis), is somewhat misleading in that the order or harmony of the universe is seen as a natural phenomenon rather than one proceeding from the gods. It is therefore better, perhaps, to describe Iban *adat* as a 'technique', or 'strategy' for living, in that it is a system, or set of procedures, by means of which an individual, and the community of which he is a part, can be integrated with the world at large, rather than some kind of formula that relates to an abstract notion of a "cosmic" or "universal order" (Jensen 1974: 211), which must be "balanced", or maintained in "equilibrium" (Jensen 1974: 104, 109-13, 211-13).

As far as the notion of divine management of the cosmos is concerned, there is a rather shadowy, ill-defined figure known as Bunsu Petara who is said to have been responsible for initiating the creation of the universe (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 50n) and whom Harrisson & Sandin refer to, again rather misleadingly, as "Almighty God" (1966: 123; 125; 129). He is described as watching over the whole of creation, together with his wife who is in a perpetual state of weeping for every small, untoward event

that occurs (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 50n). In one transcription of an Iban death dirge (*sabak*) there is a verse which states that should any one die "it is because his eyes are shining elsewhere" (Sandin 1966: 45), while he is "so preoccupied with universal concerns" that he is forever unable to attend any festivals that may be held in his honour but must instead send his representative Bikku Bunsu Petara (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 50n)³³.

This idea of constant vigilance over the universe is reminiscent of Siva maintaining the order of the cosmos through his meditations on Mount Kailasá (Basham 1959: 307), while the title of Bunsu Petara's representative - Bikku - suggests derivation from the Sanskrit term *bhiksu* (*bhikku* in Pali), meaning a Buddhist monk³⁴. This raises the possibility that Bunsu Petara may have been imported into the Iban pantheon following contact with non-Bornean influences, and this conjecture is supported to a certain extent by the fact that this deity is alternatively known as Allah Tala, Raja Entala, and Raja Gantallah (Horsburgh in Ling-Roth 1896 I: 299; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 50n; Jensen 1974: 73-75). Most sources agree that these titles are cognate with Allah and suggest an encounter with Islam, brought to Borneo by Malay and Arab traders. It may well be then, that Bunsu Petara is in fact a synthesis of Hindu³⁵ and Islamic influences, refracted through an existing pantheon of supernatural beings. The issue, however, is perhaps not all that important, for Bunsu Petara, as the god of creation, lies for the most part beyond the sphere of day to day interest. As Jensen remarks "There is less sense of a specific 'in the beginning' in Iban thinking and less concern with ultimate origins" (1974: 75). What is far more important as far as everyday existence is concerned is the large category of supernatural beings which falls under the heading of *antu*, and it is to these that I would now like to turn.

Antu

The term *antu* is cognate with the Malay and Indonesian word *hantu* and "refers generically to all types of generally anthropomorphic supernaturals, including ghosts of the dead (*antu sebayan*), diverse minor sprites and more powerful demonic spirits, except for paramount deities and major tutelary spirits, called collectively *petara*" (Sather 1978b: 313). Like the omen birds, *antu* are said to be able to take on a corporeal manifestation and not infrequently they appear in the form of a wild animal or snake. More usually, however, they are encountered at night in a person's dreams which are thought to reflect experiences in the transempirical realm inhabited by the gods, *antu* and legendary heroes of Iban mythology.

Jensen tells us that *antu* are "quite often evil" (1974: 101; ff.), but as the use of the term evil raises the problematic issue of indigenous theories of morality and ethics, I prefer to gloss *antu* as agencies of misfortune. Even this label needs some qualification for as we have seen in connection with the notion of a 'spirit helper' (*antu nulong*; see pp. 101-102) not all *antu* are malevolent, although most are certainly capricious by nature and liable to react unpredictably, often with unfortunate consequences. In general then, despite the occasional assistance that *antu* may give to particular individuals, more often than not they are the agents of illness, disease and other misfortunes such as sterility (*antu punas*) (Jensen 1967: 168-69), wastefulness (*antu rua*) (Jensen 1974: 176; 178; 199; Sather 1977a: 164; Richards 1981: 310), and famine (*antu lapar*) (Jensen 1974: 192).

In a sense, *antu* may be regarded as personifications of those aspects of human experience which lie beyond man's control. In this respect, one therefore finds that while there is an overall tendency for *antu* to be associated with misfortune, which is both unsolicited and unforeseen, by the same token they may sometimes be identified with the equally unpredictable twists and turns of good luck^{es} - hence the *antu nulong* or spirit helper. On the whole, however, *antu* are looked upon with a mixture of anxiety and distaste, and as Jensen observes, they "are associated in stories with fear of the dark, fear of being alone or lost in the jungle, fear of being attacked by ferocious animals, snakes, and the like - these are the shapes in which *antu* most commonly appear - and fear of the dead returning for revenge or in spite" (1974: 95).

The legendary heroes

The third major category of supernatural beings is that of the legendary heroes of Panggau Libau. At one time, it is said, man and the gods lived together side by side, at a place variously known as Temaga Gelang, Tembawai, Repok Lampong, Lentur Ujong or Terusan Tanjong Bakong (Jensen 1974: 94; Richards 1981: 249-250; 378). As is often the case in Iban mythology, this region is given a specific geographical location - an area extending over three rivers in the lower Ketungau valley (Richards 1981: 378). There the gods and early Iban lived as one until the community was divided by a fateful dispute. Different versions of this myth report that the quarrel involved a fruit tree, stolen tobacco or the offence caused when Lang was forced by a member of the community to dance against his

wishes (Jensen 1974: 94; Richards 1981: 378-9). Whatever the cause, this dispute led to the dispersal of the gods and men to the various cosmological zones that they inhabit today. In the course of this great upheaval, the ancestors of the Iban were themselves divided into two further factions, one being led by a character by the name of Buntak, and the other, by the greatest hero in Iban folklore, Keling. This split is said to have taken place at the foot of mount Kedempai in the Second Division, and while Keling led his followers up the mountainside to the heavens, Buntak and his supporters chose to remain behind. This latter group were the forefathers of the Iban people of today, but those who followed Keling retained their supernatural powers to become the legendary heroes of Iban mythology (Brooke-Low in Ling-Roth 1896 I: 337-38; Jensen 1974: 95; Richards 1981: 145; 379)²⁷.

As a group of supernatural beings, the legendary heroes are regarded with great admiration, and Iban oral literature abounds with stories that tell of the extraordinary adventures and exploits of these homeric figures (Perham 1886; Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896I: 326-37). At the same time, the legendary heroes are also seen as the benefactors of mankind, for they are said to have been responsible for introducing the Iban to many innovations - in particular, the use of plants and herbs for medicinal and other purposes, such as poison for fish and game, or mordants for dyeing (Richards 1972: 68; 1981: 250).

In many respects, the heroes of Panggau Libau occupy a position somewhere between mankind and the gods (*petara*). That is to say, like the gods they are endowed with supernatural powers, yet at the same time, they are distinctly more 'human' than Pulang Gana, Lang Sengalang Burong and the other major deities of the Iban pantheon. Indeed, and they are generally

more accessible, or down to earth (quite literally, in that the mountainside location of Panggau Libau is situated midway between the terrestrial world of men and the sky realm of Langit) than the gods of war, agriculture, or other leading figures in the Iban pantheon. In this light one can argue that the stories in which they are featured should be understood as a kind of dramatic social commentary, which sets out the ideals and aspirations of Iban society (Sutlive 1977)²⁸. Accordingly, one finds that the legendary heroes are almost invariably depicted as great war leaders, while their wives and womenfolk are portrayed as master weavers and experts in the art of dyeing cloth (Sandin 1977: 188). More specifically, Keling may be identified as the personification of ideal masculine attributes, while his wife, Kumang, may be seen as the paragon of feminine virtues.

In summary then, the Iban pantheon can be divided into three major categories: the gods and tutelary spirits (*petara*); capricious and frequently malevolent spirits and demons (*antu*); and the legendary heroes of Panggau Libau. These three classes of supernatural beings inhabit an invisible, transempirical realm which though distinct from the domain of men, nevertheless overlaps in many places with the phenomenal world of everyday experience. As we have seen, the exact relationship between these two realms, the one physical, the other mythical, is not clearly set out in Iban exegesis (Jensen 1974: 103-4); thus, Jensen writes:

"There is no doubt that contact occurs constantly ... but the Iban have no precise geographical/topographical concept of their spatial relations. The territories are distinct, yet in touch" (1974: 103).

What is important, however, as far as the Iban themselves are concerned, is the fact that these two domains *do* coincide in some way with one another, so that given the right circumstances it is possible to encounter gods, *antu* and heroes in the 'real' world of experiences, and at the same time, for men to travel abroad in the metaphysical world of supernatural beings. The communications of the omen birds and extraordinary events in daily life support the former conclusion, while dreams and visions testify to the existence of some other 'reality' beyond the sphere of waking experiences. That it is possible for ordinary mortals to encounter gods, *antu*, heroes, even the dead in this latter realm is a most important aspect of Iban religion and relates to the metaphysical constitution of man. It is to this topic, then, that I now turn.

Semengat

Freeman tells us that

"According to Iban belief, every person has a *semengat* or separable soul. This *semengat*, during life, inhabits the body, though it does have the power of wandering abroad; and dream experiences, say the Iban, are evidence of this" (1970: 21)

The term *semengat* is widespread throughout the Malay and Indonesian cultural region and is often translated by ethnographers as 'soul' - just as Freeman himself does here. Quite apart from the delusions created by applying our own metaphysical categories and notions to those of another

culture, it would also be wrong to assume that the indigenous understanding of the term *semengat* is the same throughout this region. For this reason I would like to pay careful attention to what the Iban themselves have to say in connection with their use of the term *semengat*.

The Iban description of *semengat* informs us that it is a separable, insubstantial, and for the most part invisible, counterpart, or replica of the thing or being to which it belongs. In this sense one may properly describe it as a spiritual entity while distinguishing the use of the term 'spirit' in this context from that of 'soul', which possesses both moral and anthropocentric connotations³⁹. This distinction is important, for *semengat* is not an exclusively human quality, although its exact distribution is not always clear. For example, Freeman tells us that it is "an unshakeable Iban belief that all objects - animal, vegetable and mineral - possess a separable counterpart called *semengat*" (1970: 35). Jensen on the other hand implies a more utilitarian allocation of *semengat* for he reports that "animals, insects, vegetables or inanimate matter, which have no significance for the Iban, have no *samengat*, like cockroaches for example" (1974: 108-9).

This apparent discrepancy is resolved, however, by Uchibori who writes that "according to Iban theories, every natural object contains *semengat*; though it is only when the spiritual nature of a particular object is being considered that the existence of *semengat* in an object is explicitly propounded" (1978: 16). In this respect *semengat* can be understood in the most general terms as a potential, or a kind of latent identity. As far as human beings and other living creatures are concerned, however, *semengat* is perhaps better described as an essential counterpart, or "spiritual personality" (Sather 1980b: xxix), that exists in a different

plane to the physical domain or the corporeal self, but which in certain states of consciousness - for example, that of dreaming (*mimpi*), or a shamanic trance (*luput*) - is the active, or experiential, component of an individual's persona.

In the case of mankind this spiritual counterpart is described by some informants as being like a shadow (*baka kelemanyang mensia*) (Howell & Bailey 1900: 146; Jensen 1974: 107), and by others, that it is a manikin - a scaled down replica of its owner - about the size of a thumb (Richards 1962: 410; Jensen 1974: 107). In his dictionary Richards writes that the *semengat* is "exactly like the body it inhabits (even to clothes)" (1981: 336), while shamans assert that they are able to recognize the *semengat* of individuals when they encounter them in their state of trance (*luput*), by virtue of their close resemblance (Uchibori 1978: 13).

Evidently, the actual representation of the *semengat*, as an image, is somewhat variable and open to individual interpretation. Thus Uchibori remarks that "usually the image of the *semengat* is of rather little consequence to the Iban" (1978: 15). What is important, however, is the firm conviction that the *semengat* does exist - dream experiences testify to this (Uchibori 1978: 15) - and that in the case of living creatures it constitutes their vital essence or animating principle ⁴⁰.

This latter notion is expressed in the belief that prolonged absence of the *semengat* from the body will inevitably lead to death. Temporary absence - as for example in dreams when the *semengat* wanders abroad in the supernatural realm - has no ill effects, but if this state should persist then the individual concerned will fall ill, and eventually, if the separation is irreversible, he or she will die. Similarly, it may happen that an individual will receive the unwelcome attentions of a malevolent

antu who will attack and wound his or her *semengat* with spears and darts, and who may even abscond with it altogether. In such instances the victim of this supernatural attack will again be weakened and fall ill, and as before, death will ensue if the displaced *semengat* is not retrieved. In short, one finds that although the *semengat* is distinguished from the body (*tuboh*), and is said to have a separate existence, the Iban do not think of them as entirely independent entities, for a person's health and well-being, or the health and well-being of any living organism for that matter, is evidently very much a function of the condition, or 'spiritual harmony', of their *semengat*.

The restoration of *semengat*

Loss and afflictions of the *semengat* require the services of a *manang*, or shaman, if health is to be restored. These involve the shaman entering into a trance (*luput*) that enables him to project his own *semengat*⁴¹ into the realm of supernature so as to search for the errant *semengat* of his patient, or else to do battle with the *antu* that plague it⁴². This undertaking is of course potentially dangerous to the shaman's own health and safety, and so, in addition to his fee, the Iban *manang* is also provided with certain ritual items that are understood to afford some protection for his *semengat*. These include a jar (*tepayan*) to contain it; a piece of steel (*besi*) to 'strengthen' (*kering*) it; and a fathom of calico to shield it from the 'heat' (cf. *angat*, see p. 99) of such a dangerous mission (Jensen 1974: 147; 150). Upon locating the errant *semengat*, the *manang* must then try to recapture it - a procedure which frequently necessitates entering into combat with the malevolent *antu* who has abducted it (Howell &

Bailey 1900 122; Gomes 1911: 172-3; Perham 1887: 99; Freeman 1967: 340; Sather 1978b: 341, 343, 350; Richards 1981: 263). If he is successful in this task, the *manang* is able to return the repossessed *semengat* to his patient, most usually through the crown of the latter's head (Perham 1887: 91; Nyuak 1977: 193; Gomes 1911: 168; Jensen 1974: 149; Freeman 1979: 235), thus restoring health and vigour. If, on the other hand, he fails, and the *semengat* remains displaced from the patient's body, then there is nothing more that can be done and the dispossessed individual will presently succumb to his illness and die.

***Semengat*, Morality and Social Control**

The relationship between the body (*tuboh*) and *semengat* is, as we have just seen, one of dependance in that the physical health and well-being of an individual can be directly related to the state of health of his or her *semengat*. This correlation works in both directions for one also finds that any attack or injury to the physical body is seen as having a deleterious effect upon the *semengat*, and in the case of human beings this notion extends to include the social person and the property that an individual possesses. Thus Sather reports that

"any act that causes another person bodily injury, loss of social respect, or does damage to his property is seen by the Iban, not only as a secular grievance, but also as an attack upon the victim's soul [*semengat*], and in such instances ritual compensation is required to repair the spiritual injury done, in addition to any secular damages, or indemnities, that might be claimed" (1980b: xxix).

In this way the regulation of society by means of *adat* law is underwritten by a supernatural sanction.

The concept of *semengat*, however, lies outside the domain of ethics and in this respect the Iban notion of *semengat* differs significantly from western notions of the soul. By this I mean that moral responsibility is not a feature of the Iban conception of *semengat*, but is instead said to be located with the heart or liver (*ati*) (Uchibori 1978: 17). Thus in relation to moral accountability, the *semengat* is said to have a 'personality' or volition of its own, and independent from that of its owner. In this respect it is therefore quite possible for the moral character of a man to be at odds with that of his *semengat*. For example, an individual's *semengat* may fall under the influence of an *antu* and itself become a malevolent agency that preys upon the *semengat* of others (Uchibori 1978: 17). In this instance, though the Iban may identify such a person as the owner of a 'bad' (*jai*) *semengat*, they will not hold him morally responsible for his supposedly harmful influence over other members of society. Nor do they attribute to him any 'evil' intentions: it is not he but his *semengat* who is to blame (Uchibori 1978: 17).

To summarize briefly, the concept of *semengat* lies at the very heart of Iban religious ideology. That is to say, the idea that there is a spiritual counterpart to all things - be they animate or inanimate - allows the Iban to construct an alternative 'reality', which though it overlaps, or coincides, with the world as it is known to men, nevertheless is also part of a mythical landscape inhabited by gods, spirits, and other supernatural beings and phenomenon. As far as human beings are concerned, Uchibori tells us that

"The Iban conception concerning the relation between the *semengat* and the bodily existence of its owner corresponds exactly to the relation between the dream world and the physical world. While the *semengat* is an actor in the dream world, it is the corporeal being that stands and behaves in the physical world. But, in fact, this division is not impassable. On the contrary, there is a constant flow of experiences from the subconscious realm of dreams to the conscious realm. In a sense, these two realms of experience are continuous. An experience in a dream can produce important effects on the experience and behaviour of the dreamer in the physical world through revealing something mystical to the dreamer's consciousness. We can reasonably say that the *semengat* functions in this context as if it were the subconscious self and makes up the second personality of an individual, largely distinct from his conscious physical self. The peculiar ability of shamans consists in the supposed use of this second self". (1978: 18-19).

In short, the concept of *semengat* permits the Iban to fuse the mystical with the physical so that the two realms are seen as but two different aspects, or levels, of experience, of a single, homogeneous universe.

Death and the fate of the *semengat*

We have seen that the inevitable outcome of an irreconcilable disjunction between the body (*tuboh*) and the *semengat* is death. Whereas the former rapidly decomposes in the tropical climate and is disposed of as speedily as possible, the latter is said to continue to exist and the proper location of the *semengat* of the dead in the afterworld - *Sebayan* - is an important aspect of Iban religion.

The Iban recognize the cessation of breathing as the moment at which death occurs, and indeed *nyawa*, meaning 'mouth' or 'breath', can also be used as a term for 'life' (Richards 1981: 238)⁴². At this point friends and relatives call out '*Fulai, pulai*', 'come back, come back (home)', in a last

attempt to recall the dying man's *semengat* to his body (Perham 1884: 288; Gomes 1911: 134; 1977: 72; Jensen 1974: 107-108; Sather 1978b: 328). If they fail in this respect, then it is thought that the displaced *semengat* has reached the point of no return along the route to Sebayan⁴⁴, and that no more can be done for the now deceased man. In some healing rites (*pelian*) the shaman is said actually to travel along the road to Sebayan in his attempt to retrieve the *semengat* of his patient. A ritual of this sort is known as *pelian nemuai ka Sebayan* - 'making a journey to Sebayan' - and can only be undertaken by the highest grade of shaman, namely the transvestite *manang bali* (Perham 1887: 98; Howell & Bailey 1900: 121; Richards 1981: 263). Needless to say, this is considered a very dangerous task and the shaman's fees are commensurate with the hazardous nature of this undertaking.

In circumstances when even these measures fail to recover the errant *semengat* and the ties between body and *semengat* are permanently severed, then it is said the *semengat* of the deceased continues its progress in the direction of the land of the dead, following the course of the legendary Mandai river to Sebayan proper which is situated in the headwaters of this semi-mythical river. In order to assist this passage between life and death, surviving members of the deceased's *bilek*-family commission a professional wailer to sing an elaborate and lengthy dirge (*sabak*) which describes the route that the *semengat* of the dead man must take. It is said that friends and relatives who have died previously also help in this task, escorting the deceased to his new home in Sebayan.

In most reports, the Iban afterworld is portrayed as being very similar to the realm of the living, except that conditions are much more favourable and life generally more enjoyable. Howell tells us that

"The deceased according to Dyak belief, after the *Sabak nerengka*, is safely lodged in Hades, and enjoys happiness, ease and luxuries. The fertility of the soil of Hades it seems, is beyond comparison, and the deceased only requires a few inches of land to farm on. The rivers there abound in fish, and the woods are full of game that is good for food" (1977: 77)

The dead indulge in all the occupations of the living and in particular their favourite pastime of cockfighting, and there is a generally festive air characterized by populousness (*rami*) and humour (Uchibori 1978: 233). As Uchibori remarks, the Iban afterlife is conceived as "a modest idealization of the life of the living".

Certainly, for those who die a 'good' death - ie, in bed, after a long life and leaving children and grand-children behind to continue the *bilek* (Jensen 1974: 208) - there is nothing to fear in death. There are some, however, who are not so fortunate, owing to the circumstances of their death. These include those who have lost their way in the forest and died (*mati tesat*); those who have died as a result of falling from a great height (eg: when climbing for bee's nests) (*mati laboh*); those who have died through drowning (*mati lemas*); those who died without having children or before their time (*mati pandak umor*); those who have died as a result of *tubai* (derris root) poison (*mati makai tubai*)⁴⁵; those who have died in war, or been killed in traps (*mati ngayau tauka / pangka' peti*)⁴⁶; those who have died from wounds (*mati telih*); women who have died in childbirth (*mati beranak*); and aborted fetuses (*anak lulus*) (Sather 1978b: 329)⁴⁷.

The unfortunate inhabitants of these alternative locations for the dead are deprived of the full enjoyment of the pleasures of Sebayau, and in particular that of meeting up with previously dead friends and relatives,

unless, of course, they happened to have succumbed to the same fate. Instead, they are condemned to the endless pursuit of some never to be completed task which is usually related in some way to the manner of their death. For example, those who have died in battle are perpetually engaged in warfare against the demon *sereganti* (Nyuak 1977: 183; Richards 1981: 343), while those who have died as a result of a fall are forever constructing climbing ropes (Nyuak 1977: 183)). Consequently they are always too preoccupied to attend the *gawai antu* festival - a lavish celebration, held periodically in honour of the dead - but must instead continue in their appointed tasks (Sather 1978b: 330-31). For everyone else, however, the after-life is something to be enjoyed and therefore, theoretically at least, to be looked forward to.

As already mentioned, Sebayán is thought of as closely resembling the world of the living. There is, however, one important difference or contrast and this is that Sebayán - in relation to the realm of the living - is a reverse or inverted world. Harrison writes of "the constant *sabak* [death dirge, see above] idea that whatever is one way in life is reversed in death" (1965: 19), and this is a common theme occurring throughout Southeast Asia. Accordingly one finds that in the Iban conception of Sebayán, day is night and night day, that the dead walk backwards, and that they speak in a contradictory manner (*tusang* - lit 'upside down') (Perham 1884: 294; Jensen 1974: 93; Uchibori 1978: 142). It follows that blindness in this world may indicate second sight in the next, and Jensen suggests that this might account for the fact that many shaman have poor sight (1974: 104). It also provides an explanation for why the dead are usually encountered in dreams, ie, at night when it is day in Sebayán and the dead are out and about (Jensen 1974: 116).

Many of the rituals to do with death similarly incorporate the theme of reversal or inversion. For example, following a burial, branches are placed in the ground upsidedown (growing tip downwards) to act as a fence against the return of the deceased (Howell 1977: 69; Uchibori 1978: 68); a model ladder for entry to the longhouse (*tangga*), is also made and placed, inverted, along the path leading from the cemetery for the same reason (Perham 1884: 291); the skylight in the *bilek* of the deceased is closed so that although it is dark in this world the journey of the dead to the next world will be well lit (Jensen 1974: 93); black rice is eaten by the bereaved family, signifying not only their own sorrow, but at the same time the anticipated happiness (ie, white rice) of the deceased on reaching Sebayan (Jensen 1974: 94); and so forth. According to Uchibori, this emphasis on the inverted or reversed nature of Sebayan should not be understood as indicative of a complete separation of the world of the dead from the realm of the living (1978: 237). Rather it should be interpreted as a "figure of speech intended to make a minimal contrast between two worlds which are otherwise too similar to each other" (Uchibori 1978: 137). Quite what Uchibori means by "too similar" is unclear, but certainly the boundaries of this world and the next are seen as contiguous rather than separated or apart. A common Iban saying explains: "No thicker than the skin of the brinjil fruit is the division between us Iban, and those of Sabayan" (Freeman 1970: 39); while Uchibori tells us that the translucent inner skin of the fruit of the *lemayang* palm (*Salacca* sp.) is often used as a metaphorical representation of this boundary between the living and the dead (1978: 219-20, 298-99).

Uchibori comments that this imagery reflects "the existential proximity between being alive and being dead as well as the ontological

continuity between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead" (1978: 299). This notion is also evident in the representation of the transition from life into death as a journey along the river Mandai to Sebayan situated in the headwaters. The Mandai is, in fact, a real river⁴⁸, which has its source somewhere to the northeast of the Melawi and enters the Kapuas - the original homeland of the Iban before their migration to Sarawak (see p. 73) - in the swampy region to the southeast of the Kapuas lakes (Richards 1962: 409; 1981: 205). It is also supposed to be connected, by means of an underground channel, with a bottomless pot-hole in the Ulu Ai region (Lubok Kelubai) (Richards 1962: 409) which, it will be recalled, was the initial location of the Iban upon first entering Sarawak three to four centuries ago.

As in other areas of Iban religious ideology, the geographical reality of the Mandai river reflects the notion of a "topographic continuity" (Uchibori 1978: 298) between the mundane world and the various regions of the Iban mythical universe - in this instance the realm of the dead⁴⁹. The actual articulation of the two spheres, as elsewhere, is not clearly defined in that while some say that Sebayan is situated beneath the earth, others maintain that it is located on the earth's surface, though at a great distance from the realm of the living (Jensen 1974: 104; Uchibori 1978: 229-32). Thus one finds that the reversal of day for night in Sebayan is frequently said to be due to its supposed location on the under, or reverse, side of the earth (Uchibori 1978: 236-37). Similarly, references to an 'earthen door' (*pintu tanah*) in *sabak* death dirges, while they can be understood at one level as allusions to the grave, may also be interpreted as relating to the notion that Sebayan is reached by passing through the earth to the other side where everything is found to be in reverse order.

In some instances it is said that at one time it was possible for the dead to return and visit the living but that following the felling of an enormous fig tree whose canopy was blocking out the light of the sun, the way was permanently obstructed and direct communication between the living and the dead brought to an end (Richards 1962: 411; 1981: 205)⁶⁰. In this particular account, Sebayán would appear to be located on the earth's surface, and there are even some Iban who claim that the realm of the dead is actually superimposed upon that of the living, but that it ordinarily remains unperceived.

Evidently the exact location of the realm of the dead is not especially important for the Iban and there is no particular reason why it should be: the dead simply inhabit a different cosmological space in the same way that the gods (*petara*), spirits (*antu*) and the legendary heroes (*orang pangau libau*) each occupy their own particular domain in the Iban mythological universe. The most important thing as far as the Iban themselves are concerned is that somewhere out there, beyond the familiar landscape of the longhouse territory, lies Sebayán - with its rich soil and bountiful forests - and that it is to this location that the *semengat* proceeds following death.

As to the eventual fate of the *semengat*, the Iban do not subscribe to the notion of immortality or 'life ever lasting'. While the *semengat* of an individual is thought to survive his death - dreams of the dead testify to this fact - this survival is not for all eternity: life after death is, in the end, finite. Just how long this post mortem existence lasts is not clearly defined - some say that the *semengat* must 'die' seven times before it is finally extinguished (Nyuak 1977: 183); others that a man has seven

semengat, each of which must 'die' in turn before the point at which he ceases to exist altogether (Jensen 1974: 108). Uchibori reports that the few informants who were willing to express an opinion favoured two to three generations - i.e., a period equivalent to "the time during which there would still be people who knew a deceased person personally and might therefore recall him, for instance, in a dream" (1978: 255). As Uchibori himself points out "This is particularly pertinent because in Iban eschatology, the living's memory of the deceased, as manifested in dreams, is considered crucial evidence of the very existence of a future life in the Land of the Dead" (1978: 255).

Whatever the opinion regarding the duration of life after death, all are agreed that eventually the *semengat* of the deceased will fade away, disintegrating, or more properly, dissolving, into vapour and mist (Howell & Bailey 1900: 146-7; Nyuak 1977: 183; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 193; Jensen 1974: 108; Sather 1980a: 93; Richards 1981: 336). There is thus no conception of an immortal 'soul' as in the west; instead each individual must accept his eventual annihilation, albeit in a future far removed from his present existence in the world of the living. Like the corporeal aspect of an individual's existence, "the *semengat* has its end as well as its beginning" (Uchibori 1978: 254). As Uchibori remarks "The perishable nature of the individual *semengat* is, after all, no more than a reflected image of the mortality of individual beings, though the span of life of the disembodied *semengat* is longer than that of humans as physical entities" (1978: 254). In this respect, the ultimate dissolution of the *semengat* into vapour can simultaneously be seen as a reflection of the readily apparent decomposition of the corporeal being - an eschatological parallel that surely would have met with the approval of Hertz.

As to what happens to this vapour or moisture, this is said to re-enter the world of the living in the form of a precipitation - ie, as dew (*ambun*) - which is then soaked up by the rice plants growing in the fields (Howell & Bailey 1900: 146-7; Nyuak 1977: 183; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 193; Banks 1949: 82; Jensen 1974: 108; Uchibori 1978: 253-54; Sutlive 1978: 65; Sather 1980a: 93; Richards 1981: 336). This is obviously an extremely interesting notion, given the crucial economic relationship that exists between man and rice and the organic nature of the imagery that pervades Iban collective representations generally. It is not a topic that I wish to pursue here, however, for it will be discussed in depth in chapter 6, which deals with the relationship between man and rice in Iban religious and social ideology. For the present time then, it is sufficient for us to know that this, in Iban eyes, is man's ultimate destiny, albeit in a future far removed from his present existence in the world of the living or that which immediately succeeds it in Sebayon.

Iban festivals or *gawai*

Finally, I would like to say a brief word about Iban festivals or *gawai*. I have already referred to their importance in terms of the acquisition and public recognition of prestige and status and so in this instance I will concentrate upon their religious significance. Festivals are perhaps the most prominent feature of Iban religious life in that they are lavish and spectacular occasions that often last for several days. But despite the generally relaxed and sociable atmosphere of major Iban festivals the term *gawai* is etymologically related to the word *gawa*, meaning 'work' (Richards 1981: 96), and there is a distinctly practical or

purposeful air to the whole performance. By this I mean that while on the one hand they are seen as honouring the gods of the Iban pantheon at the same time it is hoped that these respectful observances will be rewarded by divine benevolence in the future and the gift of charms and other valuable objects of a magico-ritual nature.

Briefly, all Iban festivals resemble each other in that they are constructed around the invitation of the deities and legendary heroes to a great feast held in their honour. Much of the attention is thus focused on the incantation of lengthy chants (*pengap* or *timang*) which describe the sending of an invitation to the gods; its reception and acceptance by them; their search for charms and other suitable gifts for their hosts; and finally the journey of the divine guests to attend the festival itself. These chants are always performed at night (often several nights in succession), by professional bards (*lemembang*), and they reach their climax at dawn with the arrival of the gods and their entourage at the festival longhouse, whereupon the deities are said to intermingle with their hosts and present them with the gifts and charms that they have brought with them. Sather describes these festival song-cycles as being "rich in religious and historical allusion, symbolic metaphor, expressions of social values and shared assumptions regarding the relationship of man, nature and the spiritual world" (1977b: ix). In this respect they are an invaluable source of information and we are fortunate to have a number of transcriptions available in the ethnographic literature.

There are a number of different types of festival (see Richards 1981: 96-98), but the two most important categories are those that are to do with headhunting and agriculture, reflecting the paramount concerns of traditional Iban society. In the case of the former, the principal deity

invited is of course none other than Lang Sengalang Burong, while at the latter the attention is focused on Pulang Gana and his household. Other major festivals include the *gawai tuah*, which is aimed at procuring material prosperity and good fortune; the *gawai tajau*, or 'jar festival', which 'consecrates newly acquired jars'; the *gawai antu*, or 'ghost festival', which commemorates the dead; the *gawai sakit*, or 'sickness festival', which is held in times of widespread or persistent illness; and the *gawai engkuni*, which celebrates the first entry into a newly constructed longhouse. In each instance, the primary concern is again to invite an appropriate deity, or tutelary spirit, to attend a celebration in their honour - for example, Anda Mara, the god of wealth and good luck, in the case of *gawai tuah* and *gawai tajau*, or the celestial shamans, in the case of *gawai sakit* - and it is hoped that they will bring with them magical charms to assist their hosts in the endeavours with which they, as deities, are connected. In this respect all Iban *gawai* conform to a common pattern, diverging only in terms of minor elaborations and 'personnel changes' according to the particular aims and interests of each class of festival.

Summary of Iban religion

To speak of Iban religion as a distinct set of attitudes and 'beliefs' that are in some way separate from the rest of Iban cultural discourse is, perhaps, something of a contrivance in that mythology and religious ideology informs almost every aspect of Iban daily life. Thus the *adat* social and legal code is underwritten by supernatural sanctions and is ultimately regarded as having been passed down to the Iban by Lang Sengalang Burong - the Iban god of war - via his grandson Surong Gunting.

Similarly, the techniques and ritual of rice cultivation are said to have been learnt from Pulang Gana, owner of the soil and paramount god of Iban agriculture. In short, one finds that much of Iban society and culture is understood by them to have been organized by the gods (*petara*) who are conceived as for the most part benevolent beings who are genuinely concerned with the fate and welfare of mankind.

In this role the gods are supported by the legendary heroes (*orang Panggau Libau*) whose lives and activities, as described in the oral literature, can be regarded as providing ideal models or archetypes of social behaviour and personal virtues. Not all supernatural beings are so well-disposed towards the Iban, however, for there is a large category of capricious and on the whole malevolent spirits and demons (*antu*) who inhabit the forests and the mountains and who prey upon the lives of men. Accordingly the Iban seek to maintain friendly relations with their gods and heroes so as to be able to secure their assistance in warding off the misfortune and affliction that emanates from the machinations of *antu*. This is achieved through offerings and the periodic celebration of various festivals to which the gods and heroes are invited. It is held that in return for these gestures of good-will the gods will communicate their superior insights to mankind - either through dreams or by means of omens - and at the same time bestow upon their supplicants magical charms (*pengaruh* or *ubat*) with which they may defend themselves against the assaults of *antu* and which, more generally, will encourage the positive forces of nature to act in man's favour.

One of the key concepts underlying these ideas, and indeed much of the Iban understanding of the world at a more general level, is that of *semangat*, or the notion that all matter - be it animate or inanimate -

possesses a spirit identity or counterpart. This view permits the construction of what may be thought of as a 'separate reality' in which anything may be possible, from the commonplace to the bizarre. This supernatural plane of existence, though distinct from that of everyday experiences, nevertheless dovetails with the phenomenal world so that there is a constant exchange between the two domains. In this respect the spheres of nature and supernature may be said to overlap, or coincide, and this allows an intermittent intercourse between mankind and the gods, spirits and heroes that inhabit the Iban mythical universe - witness the mystical nature of many dreams and visions. These ideas are particularly clearly expressed in Iban eschatological beliefs where the transition between life and death is described as a kind of journey to a distant but nonetheless distinctly 'earthly' paradise. In short, for the Iban the idea of *semangat* allows the incorporation of the physical universe into the realm of supernature and vice-versa, and in the case of man it permits him, in his dreams, to participate in the same sphere as the gods, spirits, heroes and the dead.

To conclude very briefly, in this chapter I have sought to provide a general account of the most prominent features of Iban social and religious life as reported in the ethnographic literature. As I mentioned at the beginning, however, the actual selection and presentation of the material has been influenced, in no small way, by the demands of the analysis itself. That is to say, while this chapter ostensibly sets out to provide an overall picture of Iban society and culture, it must be acknowledged that in the final reckoning, the picture that is painted reflects a need to provide an adequate background to the various analytical observations and findings

that are presented below. In this respect, as I remarked earlier, the present chapter can therefore be regarded as itself a part of the final analysis.

NOTES - Chapter III

1. The longhouse is an attenuated structure, often several hundred feet in length, consisting of a number of family apartments, or *bilek*, arranged side by side under a common roof, and linked one to another by a public gallery (*ruai*) that runs from one end of the building to the other (see fig. 2).
2. The Saribas Iban were notorious in the first half of the nineteenth century for their Viking-like raids along northern shores of Borneo and it was their use of sea-going canoes which led to the Iban being widely known as 'Sea Dayak', despite the fact that the Iban are not a seafaring people as a rule but live in communities that are for the most part situated at some considerable distance from the coast. It was these maritime exploits of the Saribas Iban, and in particular, their frequent attacks on merchant shipping, which also earned them the reputation of being 'pirates' (see p. 70), although the acquisition of booty was of secondary importance to the taking of heads.
3. For example, Benedict Sandin, who was himself an Iban, gives his own genealogy which commences with the name of one of the most important deities in the entire Iban pantheon, that of Lang Sengalang Burong, the Iban god of war and much else besides (see pp. 111-113).
4. It is interesting to note that Freeman reports that in 1951 he found that the peoples of the Saribas region "vehemently refused to be called Iban, insisting instead on referring to themselves as *kami Daya*' (we Dayaks), "although this has since changed (Freeman 1981: 8).
5. For a definition of the Iban tribe, see p. 84.
6. For an account of the introduction of rubber and pepper into the Saribas region in the late eighteenth century, see Sather (1980a: 68 n.2, 69)

7. For another example of regional variation upon a single theme, see my discussion of the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai* in chapter 4.
8. This exception is, in itself, interesting, because it provides a good example of cultural innovation in response to dreams. The story goes that in the past, a member of the tribe was instructed, in a dream, by one of the community forefathers, to abolish this festival. The penalty for not heeding this instruction would be a high incidence of death and perpetual defeat in warfare. For this reason then the Iban of upper Lupar have halted the practices of holding *gawai antu* festivals in commemoration of the dead (Uchibori n.d: 33).
9. This principle is exemplified at the ritual piercing of a child's ear lobes (*gawai tusok*). This is an event of some moment in an individual's life, for his future health and welfare is thought to depend on the correct performance of this rite (Freeman 1960a: 79), and Freeman tells us that when it comes to the actual perforation of the ear it is customary to have one lobe pierced by a cognate of the father and the other a cognate of the mother, symbolizing the child's equal dependence on both sides of the family (Freeman 1960a: 79)).
10. Freeman reports that one of his informants
 "likened bilateral kinship to the making of a casting-net, or *jala*, which, when finished, is conical in shape and weighted around its circumference by iron rings, or small lumps of lead. At the commencement, a casting-net is a very small cone, but as the knotting proceeds, and one circle of mesh loops is succeeded by the next, it increases in size until its final circumference is measured not in inches but in fathoms. In the same way, kinsfolk, whose forebears were once closely related, grow further and further apart ('*nyau se nyau*': 'distant and more distant'), until, in the end, they do not even know that they are kindred" (1970: 68).
11. The reasons for withdrawing vary. Personal animosities within the longhouse may make a change of residence desirable, or, alternatively, the ever-present need for new lands may lead a family to leave a long settled area in order to join a newly established longhouse in a pioneering region where fresh tracts of virgin forest are available.
12. For example, a family 'Y' may move to a pioneer longhouse where a relative in family 'X' resides. Subsequently, a family 'Z' also decides to join the new longhouse by virtue of some cognatic link with a member in family 'Y' who is not the same individual as the

member linking family 'Y' with 'X'. The situation that occurs here is that while family 'Z' is related to one other family in the longhouse, namely 'Y', family 'Y' on the other hand is related to both 'X' and 'Z'.

13. At the time of Freeman's research (1949-51), approximately 50% of marriages were contracted outside the longhouse (1970: 91), but this figure would probably have been somewhat lower in earlier times when the danger of enemy raids would have reduced the degree of social contact between neighbouring communities.
14. It sometimes happens that the title *pun bilek* will pass to an affinal member of the family, rather than a direct descendant of the owners of the *bilek* in the previous generation (Freeman 1970: 39). For example, a woman might marry into a *bilek*-family, only for her husband to subsequently die. She may then marry again, but on this occasion her husband might choose to come and live with her in the *bilek* apartment belonging to her first, deceased husband's family. Children of the second marriage will nevertheless have full rights of inheritance despite the fact that their only link with the former owners of the *bilek* is through the now defunct affinal relationship of their mother to her former parents-in-law. This example provides a good illustration of how the rule of residence overrides any consideration of consanguinity in terms of *bilek*-family affiliation.
15. The figures for the incidence of these two forms of marriage indicate that there is no preference for either one or the other (Freeman 1970: 24-26).
16. See Freeman (1970: 143-44) for principles of land tenure.
17. This remark may be less true for the Saribas region where prolonged contact with Malay communities, in which a hereditary class of aristocrats is to be found, has probably instigated the contemporary interest in the preservation of lengthy genealogies stretching over several generations and often commencing with some deity or legendary hero as an apical ancestor (see pp. 76-77; also n. 23).
18. This theme is repeatedly stressed in numerous folk-tales and proverbs. Sutlive gives the following example:
 'Let the law be equal for all,
 Just as a bushel measure is the

same for everyone.
 Do not ask some to climb the
 thorn tree (*nibong*) and others
 to climb the smooth betel (*pinang*) tree'
 (Sutlive 1978: 109).

19. There is a special term - *madi* (c.f., *padi* rice) - for seeking padi on loan (Richards 1981: 201).
20. Freeman tells us that:
 "In every community there are men of outstanding prowess, who excel in tackling the more difficult giants which are always left till last, and have the special name of *galau*. Felling these *galau* is a pastime not without hazard, for it can happen that one of them, on falling, will recoil - suddenly and without warning - and crush the axeman before he has had time to escape. The adventures and misadventures of *nebang* [felling] are a favourite topic of Iban men, and each year as the new season approaches old stories are told anew, and the tasks that lie ahead relished in advance. Sometimes, indeed, a man will lay claim to a tree which for some reason or other has taken his fancy, or which, perhaps, he views as a challenge to his skill. In Iban ritual invocation (*timang*), the prowess of their gods and culture heroes in felling immense and primordial trees is a recurrent theme" (1970: 174).
21. Freeman gives us an example of the title '*Kapal Tanah*' or 'Steamship of the Land', which was coined for a certain Majin, a former member of the longhouse where Freeman was based. He adds that "although, in 1950, Majin had been dead for five years, I was frequently told of his prowess" (1970: 209).
22. Freeman reports that "before proposing a judgement when the *adat* law is not decisively clear, it was common for Iban mediators (*tuai*) to seek the concurrence of the parties to a dispute by asking: 'Are you willing to accept our words' (*Ka kita ninga jalo kami*) " (1981: 59, n.44).
23. Freeman tells us that
 "When the official positions of *tuai rumah*... had been firmly established in the twentieth century, the innovation of a son succeeding to the privileged position of his father was increasingly introduced. Indeed, attempts were made by officers of the Brooke Raj to institute the practice of

primogeniture among the cognatic Iban. For example, in 1937, when Pioh, the *tuai rumah* of a long-house in the Sungai Sut in the Baleh region, died, his eldest son, Adin, who was then aged about 29 years, was summoned by the District Officer, Kapit, from the distant Baram River (where he was on a *bejalai*) and told that he *must* succeed his father. Adin did not want this responsibility and, despite the District Officer's urging, declined the office that was being thrust upon him" (1981: 55-56, n. 26)

24. Freeman writes:

"There is, in my opinion, no justification for describing a *tuai rumah* as a *chief*, though this is often done in accounts of Iban life. The term 'chief' - as generally used in anthropological analysis - refers to a status far removed from that of an Iban *tuai rumah*. Polynesian chieftainship may be taken as an example. In Polynesia, a chief is the titled head of a unilineal descent group and, in many cases, he traces his descent from the gods. As such, he possesses chiefly *mana*, and is hedged about by *tapu*, and attitudes of extreme respect and deference. He is addressed in honorific language, receives tribute, and in his person are vested great powers and many privileges ... (A)n Iban *tuai rumah* possesses none of these attributes, for, as is only to be expected, in a generally egalitarian society, without unilineal descent groups, political authority is rudimentary in its character. To call a *tuai rumah* a 'chief' is only to invite misunderstanding of his true status (1970: 114n).

25. Freeman tells us that in the construction of a new longhouse "The first post is usually that of the *tuai burong*'s apartment, and the *tuai burong* is regarded as the *pun rumah*, or founder of the longhouse" (1970: 121; see also 1961: 162; Richards 1972: 70)

26. Such men were sometimes known by the alternative title *pun mubok menoa* - lit. 'originator of the opening up of the land' (Freeman 1981: 35).

27. Fig trees are particularly associated with spirits (*antu*), which are said to reside either in their branches, or else at the foot of their trunk (Crosland in Ling-Roth 1896 I: 286; Perham 1882: 297; Gomes 1911: 200; Jensen 1974: 85 n; Richards 1981: 139; Nyuak 1977: 198). Gomes writes:

"The wild fig tree (*kara*) is often supposed to be inhabited by the spirits. It is said that one way of testing whether the *kara* tree is the abode of spirits or not is to strike an axe

into it at sunset, and leave it fixed in the trunk of the tree during the night. If the axe be found next morning in the same position, no spirit is there; if it has fallen to the ground, he is there and has displaced the axe!" (1911: 200; see also Perham 1882: 217).

28. Freeman mentions that Charles Brooke, the second raja of Sarawak, "was believed, by the Iban, to have practised *nampok* on the summit of Mt. Santubong, when he was Tuan Muda [their apparent], and to have been told by Kumang (the wife of Kling, the most famed of all the Iban culture heroes), that he would become the ruler of all Sarawak - as he indeed did" (1981: 60, n. 48).

29. In other words, upon the completion of a full agricultural cycle.

30. Although the appearance of a brahminy kite in the skies is generally regarded as a favourable sign, particularly during the celebration of a headhunting festival when it indicates the actual presence of Lang himself, Sengalang Burong is not, in fact, an omen bird in the sense that his seven sons-in-law are.

31. Nendak is not, in fact, married to one of Lang's daughters (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 265, 283, 285; Richards 1972: 65; 1981: 227; Jensen 1974: 89 n.1, 110 n.2; Sather 1980b: xxxii; Sandin 1980: 97), but is described instead as "a poor client ... who lives in a room without a gallery attached to Kelabu's apartment at one end of Singalang Burong's longhouse" (Sather 1980b: xxxii). In this context, Harrisson & Sandin refer to Nendak as a "lesser omen bird" (1966: 265), while Richards reports that his 'words' carry less 'bite' or 'weight' on account of his lowly social status (1972: 65; see also Sandin 1980: 97).

32. Burong Malam, it will be seen, is not, in fact, a bird as such, but is instead a species of cricket. Although Harrisson & Sandin would seem to imply that his status as an omen bird is a general one, found throughout the Iban cultural region (1966: 56, 264-65, 284), Richards argues that this treatment of Burong Malam is peculiar to the Saribas region (1968: 132). Certainly Freeman makes no mention of Burong Malam in his article on Iban augury (1961), based upon his findings in the Baleh region, while Jensen would appear to be in agreement with Richards' position (1974: 59n, 91n, 132n). Richards, however, does agree subsequently with Harrisson & Sandin in as far as Burong Malam is said to be married to one of Lang's daughters (1981: 227; see also Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 59, 263-65; Richards 1972: 66, 67; Jensen 1974: 91, 132 n; Sather 1980a: xxxii).

33. According to Harrisson & Sandin, Bikku Bunsu Petara is, in fact, another brother of Lang Sengalang Burong et al (1966: 50n, 123, 259-61).
34. Banks has also remarked that the Iban deity Bikku Indu Antu - which may be an alternative title for Bikku Bunsu Petara - recalls the Malay appellation for a Buddhist priest (1949: 86).
35. One can discern several other possible Indian influences in the Iban ethnography. For example, the term *petara* (deity) may well be derived from the Sanskrit word *Bhatara*, meaning Lord (Perham 1881: 133; Jensen 1974: 100), although Richards would appear to favour the Sanskrit *pitr* - ancestor (1981: 281). Similarly, Perham has suggested that the title of the god of the fishes - Raja Dewata - may be cognate with the Hindu term for a deity - *dewata* - (1882b: 213). There again, the alternative title for Pulang Gana - Raja Sua - suggests some connection with Siva, who, like Pulang Gana, is also a god of fertility (Jensen 1974: 78n), while the name Gana may itself be related to the Sanskrit *gana* which describes a category of demi-god attendant on Siva, or indeed the chief of the *gana* himself, Ganesa, the elephant god (NB: Banks points out in connection with this that although elephants do not actually occur in Borneo, the Iban language has terms for elephant tusks and trunks - 1949: 85). Furthermore, the special status of fig trees (see n. 27), the recurrent theme of skirt-loss in Iban oral literature, and certain parallels in ritual procedures, have led several ethnographers to suggest that there is a degree of Hindu influence in many areas of Iban culture (Banks 1949: 86, 114; Harrisson 1960: 35; Jensen 1974: 4, 78n, 83 n.2, 84 n.1, 100, 101; Richards 1981: x).
36. Sutlive writes that
"Good luck is the *summum bonum* according to a majority of Iban questioned. It is the value placed above all others, and blessed is the man on whom it falls. Good luck is the clearest and most certain sign of the favor of the gods. It is evident in success and achievements, and the blessings of the man who has luck are sought on festive occasions. The man with luck harvests bountiful supplies of rice each year. Formerly the man with good luck was in the right place at the right time, so that he performed acts of bravery and took human heads" (1978: 112).
37. Jensen tells us that in one myth
".... Kling's father, Chang Chelawang, acquired invisibility from a cobra. His own family and part of the longhouse decided to share his invisibility, but fifty families chose to remain

visible, and they constructed a new longhouse in the Ulu Merakai, near the present border [of Kalimantan and Sarawak], under the leadership of Belayan Lelang and Buntak, and from there they subsequently migrated to Sarawak" (1974: 94-95).

38. For example, the wives of the legendary heroes are often depicted as being their first cousins (Sandin 1977: 188), reflecting Iban preferences for marrying within the *kaban* (p. 75-76), which, as we have seen, is instrumental in creating alliances both within and between Iban communities. These women are said to come from a similar village of heroes situated along the banks of the Gellong river, which is yet another half real, half mythical waterway that has a common mouth with the Panggau (Sandin 1977: 181, 186, 188; Sutlive 1977: 157-158; Richards 1981: 101).
39. Spirit
"1.1. The animating or vital principle in man (and animals); that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements; the breath of life [(see p. 128 - *nyawa*)] b. In contexts relating to temporary separation of the immaterial from the material part of man's being, or to perception of a purely intellectual character. ...c. Incorporeal or immaterial being, as opp. to body or matter; being or intelligence conceived as distinct from, or independant of, anything physical or material" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary).
40. Jensen argues that the possession of *semangat* is, in human beings, "a measure of their humanity" (1974: 107)
"During the initial three months of pregnancy (called by the special word *nyera*), the embryo is said 'still to be blood' (*bedau darah*), 'it does not yet have a spirit/soul: it is not yet a true human being' (*empai bisi semangat, empai nyadi mensia*). From the third month the embryo has a spirit/soul, is human, and much greater importance attaches, for example, to abortion" (Jensen 1974: 107)
41. Recently, Sather has written that it is not in fact the *semangat* of the *manang* that actually recovers the errant *semangat* of the patient, but rather it is their *yang* - a personal guardian spirit or guide, comparable to the spirit helper (*antu nulong*) of the headhunter (Richards 1981: 417) - who carries out this task (Sather 1978b: 341). No other reference to this notion occurs elsewhere in the ethnographic literature, however, although Harrisson & Sandin do mention *yang* in connection with the performance of invocations by professional bards, or *lemembang* (1966: 76-77), remarking that "[i]n

effect, during the chant, they [the *lemembang* and his *yang*] are integrated and indivisible" (1966: 76).

42. Iban shamans may be either male or female, though more commonly they are male (Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896 I: 265; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 37; Jensen 1974: 143; Sather 1978b: 342). Only male shamans, however, may enter into battle with malevolent *antu*, which is seen as a supernatural equivalent of warfare (Sather 1978b: 342). It is interesting to note, though, that the highest grade of shaman is that of the transvestite (male), *manang bali* (*bali* - to change) (Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896 I: 271; Howell & Bailey 1900: 99; Gomes 1911: 180; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 119; Jensen 1974: 144; Richards 1981: 204)

43. Hence there is a charm for prolonging life which is known as *ubat penyangga nyawa* (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 105) - *ubat* meaning charm or medicine; *penyangga*, a support or prophylactic (Richards 1981: 406, 274, 322).

44. Horsburgh distinguishes between Sebyan Hidup (*Hidup* - 'alive'), and Sebyan Mati (*mati* - 'dead'): once the *semangat* has crossed into the latter zone, then there is no hope of recovery for its owner (in Ling Roth 1896 I: 269 n.8). The threshold between Sebyan Hidup and Sebyan Mati is sometimes represented as a swaying or see-sawing bridge: *titi rawan* (lit. 'bridge of terror') (Perham 1884: 299; Nyuak 1977: 182; Harrisson 1965: 22; Sandin 1966: 44; Richards 1981: 193). If the *semangat* of the dying man loses its balance in trying to cross this precarious causeway between life and death, and falls from the bridge, then it is revived by the cold waters of the Limban - a kind of Iban Styx that flows below - and is so restored to life. If on the other hand the 'bridge of terror' is successfully traversed then the man is well and truly dead.

45. *Tubai* is used in fishing; the river is dammed, and a quantity of the poison released, stunning the fish, which are then gathered in nets (Richards 1981: 395). It is highly unlikely that anyone should consume *tubai* by accident and so the implication here is one of suicide.

46. Often those who have died in warfare, or who have lost their heads are said to have a separate *menoa* (territory) to themselves (Nyuak 1977: 183; Harrisson 1965: 12, 39-40).

47. Unmarried women who become pregnant are required by *adat* law to name the father (Brooke 1866 I: 69; Ward 1961: 98; Richards 1963: 29; Sather 1978b: 326, 329, 330). Failure to do so indicates either promiscuity, or else, illicit sexual relations of either an adulterous or incestuous nature. In either instance, abortion carries the same connotations - namely irregular sexual activity, which is seen as potentially harmful to society, not only in terms of human relationships, but also as an infringement of the *adat* which carries the threat of supernatural repercussions (Brooke 1866 I: 69; Harrison & Sandin 1966: 282; Freeman 1970: 70; Jensen 1974: 89,90; Sather 1978b: 326, 353 n.11). Cut short from achieving full human status, the aborted foetus has a 'special' place of death - *endi Aji* - which lies outside Sebayan proper, being located on the very border, or interface, of the world of men and the various departments of the Iban mythical universe (Sather 1978b: 329). It is a junction where seventy pathways meet, and it is regularly mentioned in Iban oral literature. Here the aborted foetuses reside, wandering in all directions, and asking those they meet if they are their fathers (Sather 1978b: 329-30).

48. Richards distinguishes between Mandai Idup, the river in this world, and Mandai Mati or Mandai Jenoh (*jenoh* - 'peaceful'), the river in the next (1981: 205-6) - c.f. Horsburgh's similar distinction between Sebayan Hidup and Sebayan Mati (see n. 44).

49. One should note that the dead are actually included in the category of *antu* - *antu Sebayan* - and that like *antu* they are often encountered in dreams. The change of status indicated by this categorical distinction between the *semangat* of the living and the *antu* that are dead, occurs at the moment of death: the expression for taking a corpse to burial is thus '*nganjong antu*' - 'to escort an *antu*'. (Jensen 1974: 102).

50. It is said that the stump of this tree can still be seen today as a mountain - the Bukit Mandai - in Kalimantan, at the headwaters of the Melawi river (Richards 1962: 411; 1981: 205), and it is interesting to note that some accounts give this mountain, rather than the river Mandai, as the final resting place of the dead (Nyuak 1977: 182; Richards 1962: 409). NB the Maloh people of Kalimantan also claim that this mountain, known by them as Mandai Mati (c.f. n. 49), is the abode of the dead (Howell & Bailey 1900: 100).

CHAPTER IV.

HEALTH, MORTALITY AND THE LIFE OF PLANTS

Introduction

The Iban are surrounded on all sides by a luxuriant environment in which the rapid growth and regeneration of many plant species is a clearly perceivable phenomenon. In these circumstances, then, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that for the Iban " [t]he fecundity and flourishing, generative growth of plants is, at an individual level, the prime symbol of human fertility and healthful vigour" (Sather 1978a: 98). By the same token, the vulnerability of plants and their eventual death provides the Iban with an appropriate set of images for the representation of pathological afflictions and mortality. Thus one finds that "[a] sick person ... is said to 'yellow' (*kuning-kuning*) and 'wither' (*layu*), following from an overt comparison with dissicated [sic] or dying vegetation" (Sather 1978a: 98), and that "various words designating the dead state of plants ... are used recurrently in religious language as metaphors [sic] for dead persons" (Uchibori 1978: 30). In short, the kingdom of plants and the processes of vegetative growth and decay provide the Iban with a rich

vocabulary for the portrayal of man's corporeal existence in this life and his eventual physical demise at death.

In this chapter, I shall argue that past ethnographers - with the recent and notable exception of Uchibori (1978) - have consistently neglected, misinterpreted, or at best, underestimated the importance of this organic imagery in connection with the Iban understanding of human physiology and the treatment of disease. As a result, much of the ritual significance underlying several key areas of Iban medical practice has remained obscure and seemingly inexplicable in the light of prevailing theoretical opinion regarding the nature of Iban healing ceremonies. My principal aim here, then, is to show how a careful examination of the ethnographic literature in fact reveals the regular and systematic use of an extended botanical metaphor in Iban accounts of ill-health and the treatment of disease. Evidently this is not the only perspective on illness as the Iban conception of *semengat* clearly indicates (see pp. 124-126). Nevertheless, the suggestion here is that the floral and horticultural imagery that occurs in so many Iban healing rituals can ultimately be related to a second, and peculiarly Iban, set of ideas concerning the cause and treatment of sickness and disease.

The creation of mankind

I would like to begin by referring briefly to Iban mythology, and in particular, to those myths that tell of the creation of mankind and the constitutive elements that were brought together by the gods when they made the first man and woman. A typical account opens with the dissatisfaction felt by Raja Entalla (see p. 117) and his wife at the fact

that, having created the universe and so forth, there was no one around to possess the world and to enjoy its fruits. The simplest solution to this problem, they decided, was to populate the earth with human beings, and so they cut down a *bangkit* banana tree, which Raja Entalla then fashioned into a likeness of himself and his wife. For blood he used the red sap of the *kumpang* tree (*Myristaceae pendaharan*)¹, and the images were subsequently brought to life by him shouting at them three times (Jensen 1974: 74-75).

There are a number of very similar, if not identical, versions of this story in the ethnographic literature (Howell 1977: 25; Dunn 1977: 27; Horsburgh - in Ling Roth 1896 I: 299-300; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 186; Richards 1981: 170, 286), and although in some accounts we are told that the body of man was in fact moulded from earth mixed with water (Horsburgh - in Ling Roth 1896 I: 299-300; Dunn 1977: 27) (rather than the trunk of a banana tree), one still finds that life was induced by "infusing into his veins the gum of the *kumpang*-tree, which is of a red colour" (Horsburgh, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 299; see also Richards 1981: 332). In other words, although Iban accounts of the creation of mankind do not always agree in every detail, or conform to a single archetype, they are nonetheless unanimous on the point that primordial man was created from vegetable materials, and in particular, that the red sap of the *kumpang* tree constituted his blood.

By itself, this accord may not seem to be especially significant, but I shall argue here that this vegetable imagery must be seen in conjunction with a number of other collective representations in which the physiology of man is described, or accounted for, in terms of images that are drawn from the domain of plants. Set against this background, the

myths of creation can be understood as the assertion of a most fundamental and primordial connection between mankind and plants.

Iban theories of disease

The "fullest rites for the sick", we are told, are those of the *saut* ceremony which is only performed when all other measures have failed (Richards 1981: 326). Surprisingly, however, one finds scarcely any mention of this ritual in the ethnographic literature, other than the entries of Howell & Bailey, and Richards in their respective dictionaries (Howell & Bailey 1900: 149-50; Richards 1981: 326-7)². Even then it is evident that Richards' account is largely derived from Howell & Bailey's description recorded some eighty years earlier.

Quite why there should be so little information concerning the *saut* ceremony is unclear, given its status as the "fullest rites for the sick". Part of the explanation may lie in the rarity of its performance, but the suggestion here is that this apparent lack of interest in the rites of *saut* may also stem from a failure to comprehend fully the extent of Iban theories of disease. Indeed one finds that many elements of the *saut* ceremony are in fact present in other healing rituals but that they have been largely ignored, or remained unaccounted for, in the ethnographic literature. Again it is not entirely clear why this should be so, but it seems that a scholastic interest in the concept of *semengat* - which, as I mentioned earlier, has widespread distribution throughout the Malay and Indonesian archipelago - may have led investigators to overlook a more truly Iban understanding of sickness and disease.

This preoccupation with the Iban conception of *semengat* can be discerned in the implicit assumptions that surround its documentation in the ethnographic literature. For example, Jensen, in his chapter on sickness and healing, writes that

"[w]hen simple rites fail in their objective, the *manang* [shaman] is asked to perform more elaborate ceremonies like those used in instances of serious or recurrent sickness. Although these vary, the principle remains the same. It is based on the belief that in grave cases the *samengat* leaves the body; the gravity of the illness relates directly to the distance that the *samengat* has gone. The *manang*'s task is to discover the whereabouts of the *samengat* and return it to its owner" (1974: 147-48).

The actual methods that he employs can take a number of different forms.

Thus the shaman

"may use a small effigy (*pentik*) of the Iban fully dressed with a headcloth and ornaments to draw back the straying *samengat*. He may try to entice it back with the promise of offerings. But if, as is commonly believed to be the case, the *samengat* has been led away by a spirit, the *manang* has first to identify the spirit which has the *samengat* in its power, then cajole, coax, persuade, or force it into surrendering the *samengat* to its human owner. Sometimes he merely wills the spirit off, sometimes he barks at it, or endeavours to frighten it away, ultimately he may attempt to kill it: *bunoh antu* ... - the name often given to an important *manang* rite - and in this process he invokes the aid of his friendly and familiar spirits" (Jensen 1974: 148)

But whatever the specific details of particular healing rituals, for Jensen, the pattern of the rites is essentially the same, revolving, as they do, around the pursuit of the *semengat* (1974: 148).

This outline of Iban healing rituals (*pelian*) closely resembles earlier accounts (eg: Perham 1887: 89-91; Howell & Bailey 1900: 121-22; Gomes 1911: 165-8; Nyuak 1977: 192-3). At the same time there are also certain general correspondences with other shamanic rituals of the Malay and Indonesian archipelago in which the concept of *semangat* is similarly featured. The implicit assumption in the ethnographic literature, then, is that Iban theories of sickness and disease are by and large coterminous with those of other South East Asian peoples who also adhere to a notion of *semangat* and its loss or injury as the cause of ill-health. For the Iban however, this is not the only possible way of representing the circumstances of man's corporeal existence. That is to say, there is a second, alternative, model of human pathology in which the attention is focused, not upon the individual as such, or some spiritual facsimile of his person, but instead involves the notion of a mystical plant growing at a specific location in the Iban mythical universe. These ideas would appear, for the most part, to have been overlooked, or their importance underestimated, in previous accounts of *Iban* religious ideology - with the notable exception, that is, of Uchibori's recent examination of Iban eschatology and mortuary practices. Taking the latter study as an initial point of departure, the present chapter seeks to link this new material to earlier ethnographic records, thereby revealing the crucial significance of plant life and botanical categories in the Iban portrayal of life and death. In doing so new light is shed on some hitherto unexplained aspects of Iban healing rituals and life promoting procedures.

The *ayu*

As we have seen, the mythical account of man's creation portrays his bodily constitution in terms of plant materials, and it is interesting to note therefore, that a similar theme also emerges in the collective representation of life and death as a physiological process. In this instance, however, it is the metaphysical constitution of man, rather than his corporeal self, which is described in this way.

Freeman tells us that among the Baleh Iban the 'spiritual' composition of an individual is divided into two distinct categories of components. He writes that

"[a]ccording to Iban belief, every person has a *semengat*, or separable soul. This *semengat*, during life, inhabits the body, though it does have the power of wandering abroad; and dream experiences, say the Iban, are evidence of this. But in addition to the *semengat*, there is another entity called the *ayu*, which is a kind of secondary soul or soul-substitute. Everyone has both a *semengat* and an *ayu*, as an old *manang*, or shaman, put it: 'Our *semengat* and *ayu* share the same breath' (*'Semengat enggau ayu kitai saum seput'*)" (1970: 21).

I have already described the Iban conception of *semengat* at some length in my preliminary outline of Iban religion (p. 122 ff.), and further discussion of this set of ideas is not something that need concern us at present. Instead, I wish to concentrate upon the concept of *ayu*. Although described by Freeman as a "secondary soul or soul-substitute", the *ayu* is, in fact, very different from *semengat*, which Freeman also translates as "soul" (in this instance, "a separable soul" [1970: 21]). For a start, whereas the latter is conceived as an invisible and intangible counterpart or facsimile of the individual to whom it belongs, the *ayu* is not thought

of in anthropomorphic terms; nor is it spatially proximate with its owner, as is the *semengat*. Thus Freeman tells us that

"the *ayu* does not reside in the body. It takes the form of a plant - it is usually likened to the bamboo (*buloh*) in appearance - and it is believed to grow on a far off mountain. On the slopes of this vast mountain grow the myriad *ayu* of all the Iban people, and there they are tended by an aged and beneficent supernatural being named Manang Betuah" (1970: 21)

Similarly, Richards, in his dictionary, describes *ayu* as the "shade or image of the living" (1981: 20), and tells us that they are "like bamboo or banana and grow in clumps at *Bangkit* on a broad ridge, *Bukit Menebong* Jawa, where they are tended by *Menyayan*, chief of the celestial *manang* [shaman]" (1981: 20).

Evidently the imaginary form of *ayu* and *semengat* differ quite substantially, but in some respects there is a certain degree of overlap between the two concepts for one finds that they are both related to the health and physical well-being of the individual to whom they belong. In the case of *ayu*, good health and vitality are said to depend upon its luxuriance, or state of growth, and Freeman tells us that

"If, for example, the *ayu* should become overgrown with creepers, the individual whose soul-substitute it is, will become ill; and shamans (*manang*) are frequently commissioned to visit the *ayu* of sick persons to free them from encumbrances, and generally to tend them" (1970: 21)

In other words, the relationship between an individual and his or her *ayu* is a sympathetic one - Freeman describes it as "a kind of magical symbiosis" (1970: 21) - wherein a person's health and well-being generally, are directly related to whether or not his or her *ayu* is flourishing in the supernatural realm.

But if the concepts of *ayu* and *semengat* overlap to the extent that they are both found in conjunction with an apparent Iban aetiology of sickness and good health, they are clearly distinguished in Iban eschatology for whereas the *semengat* transcends the physical demise of the individual, the *ayu* does not survive after death, but itself dies, withering away as life ebbs, to rot and decay with the decomposition of its owner's body (Richards 1981: 20). In this light one can therefore argue that the botanical conception of *ayu* relates specifically to man's corporeal existence³ and that in this context the physiology of plants and the processes of vegetative growth and decay provide the Iban with a vivid set of images for the representation of human mortality and the circumstances of life and death.

Before discussing this set of ideas any further, it must be pointed out that the Iban conception of the term *ayu* is not everywhere the same. Most importantly, one finds that some areas do not subscribe to the idea of *ayu* as a plant, or indeed as having any kind of form or image whatsoever. For example, Harrisson & Sandin refer to the term *ayu* in their account of the Saribas healing ritual *pelian besagu ayu* (1966: 119), but in this particular instance the authors make no mention of any mystical entity in the form of a plant, or any other image for that matter. Instead they relate the term *ayu* to the word *gayu* meaning a long life (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 119). Accordingly, they interpret this rite

as being "to lift up prayers for [a] long life" (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 119) (*besagu* - to lift up).

Similarly, Uchibori tells us that among the Layar-Skrang Iban the term *ayu* is "rather vaguely defined as one's 'life'" (1978: 25), and that it is "often equated with a person's life span (*umor*)" (1978: 25). Obviously there is some correspondence between this alternative conception of *ayu* and the views of the Baleh Iban in that they are both related to the physical or corporeal existence of the individual, but, as Uchibori emphasizes, among the Layar-Skrang Iban at any rate, "*ayu* itself is not conceived as any sort of entity or as having an image" (1978: 25). Thus we are told that the *ayu* cannot be seen even by the 'second sight' of the Iban shaman (Uchibori 1978: 26), and this leads Uchibori to characterize *ayu*, in the Layar-Skrang context, as "rather an abstract concept which refers vaguely to a person's state of life" (1978: 26).

In short, it would appear that in some areas the term *ayu* is understood simply as a principle, rather than as a mystical entity that takes the form of a plant. This abstract interpretation of *ayu* does not mean to say, however, that the notion of a plant counterpart is absent altogether. On the contrary, a very similar set of ideas to the ones described above can still be discerned, the principal difference being that in this instance they fall under the heading of *bungai* rather than *ayu*.

Bungai

Uchibori tells us that according to the Layar-Skrang Iban, there is a plant that grows, unseen, in the corner of each *bilek* apartment, at the foot of the post supporting the rack set up over the fire place (*dapur*).

This plant is referred to as *bungai* (Uchibori 1978: 19-20), and Uchibori points out that although *bungai* is an everyday generic word for any kind of flower, in this instance the term has a special application. He writes: "the *bungai* we are concerned with here is something invisible and intangible to the ordinary senses, like *semengat*, and has special connection with people's health" (1978: 19-20). In particular it is felt that the *bungai* of a *bilek*-family must remain undisturbed in order to ensure the health and general well-being of family members and this idea is reflected in a number of ritual prohibitions (Uchibori 1978: 21). For example, it is forbidden (*mali*) "to cut a fire-place post because this is the supposed location of the *bungai*, and such a careless act is said to hurt the *bungai*, and consequently the health of *bilek*-family members" (Uchibori 1978: 21).

The *bungai* is invisible to the ordinary person's eye and can only be seen by *manang* who are able to observe its reflection by looking through a quartz crystal (*batu karas*) (Uchibori 1978: 20). For this reason, opinions regarding the nature of the image of *bungai* may vary. For example, Uchibori writes that

"Many have no clear image of it [the *bungai*] other than something that has a plant-like form. Some conceive an image of a certain kind of bamboo (the species called *buloh*). Others assert that the *bungai* is like a tree with its branches and leaves" (1978: 20)

There are even some who are openly sceptical about the existence of *bungai* and who maintain that this unseen 'flower' is nothing but a fabrication of *manang* who are known to be deceitful in such matters. Thus one of

Uchibori's informants, who was himself a shaman, admitted that the *bungai* did not exist in reality, but explained that it was an "analogy or metaphor [sic] (*kelulu'*)", expressed in the ritual language used by *manang* in their shamanic performances (Uchibori 1978: 20-21).

The concept of *bungai*, then, as held by the Layar Skrang, is subject to a range of interpretations, but it is important to note that Uchibori's informants are consistent in resorting to the use of plant images in their explanation of this term. In this respect, it is apparent that there is a close correlation between the Layar Skrang concept of *bungai*, and the Baleh notion of *ayu*. This includes the idea that physical health can be directly identified with the state of growth of the *bungai*. Thus Uchibori writes that

"each member of the family has a corresponding part of the *bungai*. This part represents his (her) condition of health and fate, though this individually allocated part has no specific name. According to one informant, the parts corresponding to individuals are like leaves attached to the stem of the *bungai*. If one becomes seriously ill, the corresponding leaf is withered (*layu'*) and may eventually fall (*gugur*), which means that the person dies. In the text of a death dirge, [*sabak*; (see p. 129), this individual's part is metaphorically described as a branch of the mythical plant, and the corresponding branch of the deceased member is found to be pitifully broken" (1978: 22-23).

As with the Baleh conception of *ayu*, the vegetable imagery of these ideas is reflected in the horticultural nature of those rites which are designed to encourage the healthy growth of this mystical plant counterpart. Thus Uchibori tells us that on such occasions

"a species of rush (*bemban*) or a young banana plant is put in a small jar to represent the *bungai*. A blowpipe is erected upright with its end at the bottom of the jar. The shaman walks around this apparatus, singing a ritual song (called *pelian*). In the song, he first summons the mythical shamans, Manang Menyaya and others, who are supposed to reside in the sky and on the summit of hills, to attend the ceremony⁴. Then the song proceeds to the sections in which the mythical shamans take care of the *bungai*. First they clear away overgrown weeds around the *bungai* which would hinder its growth. Thereafter, in the song, the mythical shamans cover or wrap the *bungai*. In accordance with this, the actual shaman, after having sung this section of the song, covers the plant in the jar with an *ikat* skirt or fabric" (1978: 21-22).

This last act is an extremely important part of the proceedings for it is linked to the notion that the healthy growth of *bungai* is adversely affected by heat. For example, Uchibori tells us that

"the *bungai*, like all plant life, is vulnerable to heat, especially burning sunshine, and therefore should be protected with a cover or wrap. If the *bungai* is too much exposed to the heat or light (*tampak*, lit 'bright', a condition which can be detected in a shaman's quartz crystal), the Iban say, the health of the *bilek*-family members is generally weakened (*tabin*)" (1976: 22).

In short, the efficacy of the whole ritual rests upon the notion that human existence is, in some respects, comparable to that of plants, and in particular, that personal health is directly attributable to the state of growth of a mystical plant that grows unseen in a corner of an individual's *bilek* apartment.

Clearly then, there is a close resemblance between Baleh notions of *ayu* and the concept of *bungai* as formulated among the Layan Skrang. Indeed, as Uchibori himself remarks, "the *bungai* concept of the Layan

Skrang Iban and the *ayu* concept of the Baleh Iban are almost identical" (1978: 27), for apart from differences of terminology and location", the basic idea of [a] correlation ... between the state of growth of the plant and the health of persons is the same" (Uchibori 1978: 27).

To summarize, briefly, the Iban collective representation of man's corporeal existence can be seen, in a number of instances, to rely upon a set of images that are drawn from the domain of plants and the processes of vegetative growth and decay. This is revealed in the botanical imagery of Iban accounts of illness and mortality, and in the correlation of personal health with the state of growth of a mystical 'plant soul', be it *ayu* or *bungai*. Curiously, however, one finds that these ideas have not received a great deal of attention in the past. That is to say that apart from the references cited above, there are very few other instances in the ethnographic literature where the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai* are specifically mentioned by name, and in no way are these other references found to be particularly informative or enlightening. Thus Nyuak refers briefly to *ayu* as "the shade of the deceased" (1977: 188), while Morgan & Beavitt describe *bungai* simply as a symbol of "family love" (1971: 307). Even Jensen, in his study of Iban religion, mentions *ayu* but once in his entire monograph, and then only as a footnote which describes the term as relating to "an other world spirit image of living Iban which is believed to grow in clumps like banana shoots" (1974: 115n).

The paucity of the ethnographic data in this respect might encourage the opinion that the idea of a plant counterpart is relatively unimportant as far as the Iban are concerned. Such impression, however, would be entirely misleading for if one reads between the lines of the ethnographic literature, one finds a great number of indirect or implicit references to

this notion and the ideas that surround it. These are to be found in most accounts of Iban healing ceremonies, which repeatedly refer to the use of plant materials in the construction of the ritual edifice known as a *pagar api* (see below). The role of plants in this context, I shall argue, can be directly related to the conception of *ayu* and *bungai* in the form of a plant, but their significance in this respect would appear to have gone unnoticed by past investigators - Uchibori excepted (see below). Instead, the attention has focused almost exclusively upon the idea of a loss of *semengat*, or its capture by malevolent *antu*, while the intended purpose of plants in this scheme of things is left very much to the imagination of the reader.

As I remarked earlier, this gap in the ethnographic record may be largely due to certain scholastic preconceptions as regards the nature of Iban theories of sickness and disease. That is to say, the fact that the concept of *semengat* occurs, in one form or another, among a wide variety of peoples throughout the Malay and Indonesian cultural region suggests that its presence in Iban religious theology may have tended to obfuscate, or draw attention away from, the existence of an alternative representation of individual health and vitality. Nevertheless, there still remains Richard's observation that the *saut* ceremony represents the "fullest rites for the sick". The special significance of this remark, as far as our present interests are concerned, is that the ritual attention on such occasions is focused, as I shall demonstrate below, not upon the patient's *semengat*, but rather upon their *ayu* or *bungai*, conceptualized in this instance as a mystical plant.

The rites of *saut*

Our knowledge of the rites of *saut* is somewhat limited, being restricted, as I mentioned earlier, to the entries of Howell & Bailey, and Richards in their respective dictionaries (Howell & Bailey 1900: 149-50; Richards 1981: 326-27). What is more, one finds that Richard's entry is, for the most part, simply a reiteration of the earlier account. He does, however, make it quite clear that the rites of the *saut* are primarily concerned with the care of "scorched or overgrown *ayu*" (1981: 326), rather than with an individual's *semengat*, but this is in fact perfectly evident even in Howell & Bailey's description of events, despite a certain ambiguity in their use of the term 'soul'. For example, they write:

"When a person is ill he is said by the *manang*, in their metaphorical language [sic], to have the dwelling place of his soul (*bangkit*) or its environment scorched or overgrown, and it must be looked to and either fenced around (*ngeraga bangkit*) or cleared (*besiang*) by means of the *saut* ceremony" (Howell & Bailey 1900: 149).

Clearly what we are concerned with here is the health and vitality of an individual's *ayu*, a term which Howell & Bailey translate as referring to "a representative or kindred soul in Hades" (1900: 10). In the latter instance, they provide no indication as to whether any plant imagery is involved, but they do go on to add that, "if that soul sickens then the person in this world falls ill" (Howell & Bailey 1900: 10), which of course agrees with the Baleh understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the health of an individual and the state of growth of his or her *ayu*.

Pursuing this argument further, one should note that the term that Howell and Bailey use for the "dwelling place of the soul" - *bangkit* - is described by them elsewhere in their dictionary as "a scented flower...for the... scented leaves or fruit of certain jungle trees used as scent or ornaments to decorate the hair or body" (1900: 13). This again suggests that some kind of floral imagery is involved in their account of the Iban 'soul', and one should note in this connection that the term *bangkit* also recalls the particular species of banana tree (*pisang bangkit*) felled by Raja Entalla and used by him for the creation of mankind (see pp. 153-154).

Evidently there is some kind of overlap here: on the one hand, in Iban mythology, the body of the first man is said to have been hewn from the trunk of a *bangkit* banana tree, while on the other, the term *bangkit* may also be used to describe "the dwelling place of the soul" which, in the case of *ayu*, is both conceived as taking the form of a plant and at the same time is directly related to the corporeal existence of man. In other words, whenever the term *bangkit* is employed - be it in ritual or mythological context - it serves to relate man's physical constitution, or corporeal being, to the physiology of plants, and in particular, to that of the banana tree. This connection is quite explicit for we are told by Richards that "[i]n rites for the *ayu*, a 'soul post' (*tiang ayu*) of a banana (*pisang*) stem is set up to represent the *pisang bangkit* used by the Creator (Entala) to make men" (1981: 263), although this correspondence is not specifically mentioned in his account of the rites of *saut* (see also Jensen 1974: 75).

By far the most striking evidence for relating Howell & Bailey's description of the *saut* ceremony to the ritual treatment of an individual's

plant counterpart occurs, of course, in the idea that the site of the 'soul' has become overgrown or scorched, requiring that it be cleared, or else fenced-off, if the patient is to recover. This imagery corresponds exactly with Freeman's description of *ayu*-caring rituals among the Baleh Iban (p. 159), and this apparent similarity is confirmed by Richards who in his own dictionary describes the principal aim of the *saut* ceremony as being to tend the "scorched or overgrown *ayu*, to whose place (*Bangkit*) the *manang* go in spirit and, with celestial help, clear weeds (*sempiang*) and fence it (*ngeraga*) against evil" (1981: 326). Given that Richards also describes the *saut* ceremony as the "[f]ullest rites for the sick performed by *manang* when *pelian* rites have failed" (1981: 326), it seems that the idea of a mystical plant counterpart may have a far greater importance in Iban accounts of sickness and disease than has previously been acknowledged in the ethnographic literature. This suggestion is supported by the fact that botanical representations of human existence are implicated in a number of other accounts of Iban healing, or life-enhancing, rituals. It is, then, to this additional evidence that I would now like to turn.

Some further references to *ayu* and *bungai*

Howell & Bailey divide Iban healing ceremonies, or *pelian*, into three broad categories : *pelian amat*, *pelian bebunoh antu*, and *saut* (1900: 121). *Pelian amat*, or 'true *pelian*', are concerned with the retrieval of errant *semangat* while *pelian bebunoh antu* revolve around the killing or wounding of malicious and predatory *antu* (*bebunoh* - 'to kill or wound'). *Saut*, on the other hand, are altogether different in that they are to do, as we have

just seen, with fostering the growth and vitality of an individual's plant counterpart - be it *ayu* or *bungai*. Of the three, it is *pelian amat* which in the past have received the most attention and which are the best documented in the ethnographic literature (Perham 1887: 90ff.; Haughton, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 268; Howell & Bailey 1900: 121-22; Nyuak 1977: 192-93; Gomes 1911: 166 ff; ; Schmidt 1964: 150-1; Jensen 1974: 148 ff.; Sutlive 1976: 69, 70; Richards 1981: 262-63). The rites of *saut*, however, as I have already indicated, are scarcely mentioned in the ethnography, other than as a dictionary entry.

The reasons for this emphasis upon the *pelian* rites to retrieve a displaced *semengat* are not entirely clear, but I have suggested that they may be partly related to the fact that an idea of illness being caused by a disjunction between *semengat* and body is common to many areas of the Malay and Indonesian archipelago, so that in this respect Iban *pelian amat* often bear a superficial resemblance to other shamanic rituals from this region. At the same time it would appear that the *saut* ceremony is only performed infrequently, being the ultimate resort in times of grave illness, which may again account for the relative obscurity of this category of healing ritual. But if there are few explicit references to the rites of *saut* in the ethnographic literature, one nevertheless finds that the underlying principle, or theme, of this ceremony, can actually be discerned in other, more common, Iban healing rituals. That is to say, the idea of a mystical correlation between personal health and well-being and the state of growth of some form of plant life is not restricted to the rather special circumstances of a *saut* ceremony, but can also be found in many of the images and procedures that occur in the more frequently performed *pelian* rituals.

This is most clearly seen in Perham's description of the *pelian* *betepas* ritual. He writes:

"At the time of the birth of each individual on earth, a flower is supposed to grow up in Hades, and to live a life parallel to that of the man. If the flower continues to grow well, the man enjoys good robust health; if it droops, the man droops; so whenever the man has unpleasant dreams, or feels unwell two or three consecutive days, the flower in Hades is said to be in a bad condition, the *manang* is called in to weed, cleanse and sweep around it; and so set the compound earthly and unearthly life on its right course again" (1887: 97)⁵

Evidently Perham is referring to a very similar set of ideas to those we have already discussed, and his use of the term 'flower' in this context suggests that he is in fact describing the concept of *bungai*, 'flower' being the most literal translation of this word.

It must be pointed out of course that the *pelian betepas* is but one of a great number of *pelian* ceremonies (see for example Richards 1981: 262-63), the majority of which are primarily concerned with a loss of *semangat*. Nevertheless I shall argue below that even in these other contexts it is still possible to detect certain elements, or images, that are clearly related to this alternative account of man's corporeal existence. In particular I refer to the construction of the ritual edifice known as *pagar api*, or 'fence of fire'. This curiously named structure is erected at most, if not all, Iban *pelian*, but previous inquiries have failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of its ritual significance other than as a 'shrine' round which such ceremonies are conducted. That this is so, can only be interpreted as a testimony to an ignorance of, or disregard

for, the importance of floral imagery and botanical metaphors in Iban theories of sickness and disease. By this I mean that once one examines the construction of *pagar api* in conjunction with the conception of *ayu* and *bungai* in the form of a plant, the significance of the former is immediately apparent. What is more, the fact Iban healing ceremonies so regularly involve the erection of *pagar api* (see below) can only be understood as a reflection of the central importance of this botanical imagery in relation to an Iban aetiology of health, sickness and mortality in human beings.

The *pagar api* is well documented in the ethnographic literature (Perham 1887: 90-91; Howell & Bailey 1900: 112-113; 149-150; Nyuak 1977: 188; 192; Gomes 1911: 166; 174; Sandin 1966: 36; Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 307; Jensen 1974: 148; Sutlive 1976: 70; Uchibori 1978: 99; Richards 1981: 243; 262; 342-43). Generally speaking, it consists of a vertical column or post - usually a spear or blow-pipe serves this purpose - stepped in a small jar, and 'decorated' with plant materials of one sort or another - a banana stem, bamboo shoot, palm frond or reed. For example, Howell & Bailey describe the *pagar api* as

"a spear, a bamboo, or a banana stem, raised in a perpendicular position in the centre of the covered verandah. Near the top of the spear is hung a plate, called the cover for the kindred soul (*bangkit*), and at its foot a cup is placed turned upside down in which to secure the *bangkit*" (1900: 112-13).

Clearly this structure bears a close resemblance to the ritual assembly that is put together at a *bungai*-caring ceremony as described by Uchibori (see p. 164), and the significance of the bamboo or banana stem

in this respect is corroborated by Howell & Bailey's reference to a "kindred soul" which, interestingly, they refer to here by the term *bangkit* (see above). In short, the evidence strongly suggests here that the *pagar api* should be seen as a material representation of an individual's plant counterpart which is erected in times of illness for the purposes of restorative rites. The particular significance of the *pagar api* in this respect would appear, however, to have eluded most previous investigators, with the notable exception of Uchibori (1978: 99), and latterly, Richards (1981: 326). For example, one finds that while Perham describes the *pagar api* as "a long handled spear fixed blade upwards in the middle of the verandah with a few leaves of some sort tied round it, and having at its base the 'lupongs' [bag containing charms] of each *manang*" (1887: 90), he can offer no explanation as to the significance of this ritual edifice or the purpose that it serves. On the contrary, he confesses that as to "why it is called '*pagar api*', 'fence of fire' no one has been able to tell me" (Perham 1887: 90). Similarly, Gomes writes that

"In the public hall of the Dayak house a long-handled spear is fixed blade upwards, with a few leaves tied round it, and at its foot are placed the medicine-boxes of all the witch-doctors who take part in the ceremony. This is called the *pagar api* ('fence of fire'). Why it is called by this curious name is not clear" (1911: 166).

Jensen also refers to the construction of *pagar api* in his chapter on Iban shamanism and healing practices. He writes that in the performance of a *pelian* ceremony "the accessories sometimes differ in detail but consist principally of a spear (*sangkoh*), blade up, tied with

leaves, and the *lupong* box set out below" (1974: 148). Interestingly, Jensen's choice of words and sentence construction, both here and in several other places in this chapter, strongly suggest that he has turned to the earlier accounts of Perham and Gomes for at least some of his data concerning Iban healing rituals. As we have seen, both these authors have acknowledged their puzzlement at why the *pagar api* is so called; Jensen on the other hand, somewhat curiously omits to mention this title and in doing so obscures the significance of this ritual 'accessory' still further. It is therefore only Richards who explicitly makes a connection between the vegetable imagery of the *pagar api* and the conception of *ayu* as a plant when he briefly remarks that in the context of a *saut* ceremony "[t]he pillar 'shrine' (*pagar api*) is symbolic" (1981: 326), and that the banana stem which is incorporated into its construction is in fact seen as a representation of the patient's *ayu* (Richards 1981: 326).

But if the use of plant materials in the construction of *pagar api* can be understood as an actualization of an individual's plant counterpart, what are we to make of the title itself? The answer, I shall argue below, can again be readily discerned in the light of the Iban equation between human physiology and botany, and a more general association of the world of man with the natural realm of plants.

Taking the notion of a fence first, it will be recalled that Howell & Bailey specifically mention that one of the aims of the rites of *saut* - where a *pagar api* is erected - is to 'fence around' (*ngeraga*) "the dwelling place of [the] soul (*bangkit*)" (1900: 149). In this light, it seems that the image of a fence can therefore be interpreted as a protective device erected around an individual's *ayu* (or *bungai*) much as one might encircle a delicate plant or seedling.

The imagery of fire (*api*) is a little more complex. To begin with it will be recalled that one of the reasons given for holding a *saut* ceremony is that the 'soul' of an individual, or its surrounding environment (*bangkit*), has been "scorched" (Howell & Bailey 1900: 149; Richards 1981: 320). At the same time, Uchibori tells us that among the Layar Skrang Iban the *bungai* of the patient is covered with a cloth so as to protect it from the heat of the tropical sun (p. 164), while Freeman reports that the *ayu* of the Baleh Iban may be similarly protected and for the same reasons (1970: 21). Furthermore, Richards mentions that *antu* are often said to cut down the *ayu* of the living and burn them "for their farms" (1981: 20) (presumably when firing their fields prior to planting). In other words, there are a number of references in the ethnographic literature to the notion of heat and the inimical effect that this may have upon the healthy growth of a person's plant counterpart (be it *ayu*, or *bungai*).

Following on from this, one finds that Howell & Bailey, Nyuak and Richards all draw attention to the fact that the *pagar api* may often be draped with a cloth or blanket during the course of a *pelian* ceremony (Howell & Bailey 1900: 113; Nyuak 1977: 188; Richards 1981: 342-43). None of the authors specifically state why this should be so, but the suggestion here is that the covering of the *pagar api* with material can be understood as a measure taken to protect the patient's delicate *ayu* (or *bungai*) from the deleterious effects of excessive heat.

These ideas and images are of course perfectly consistent with the Iban portrayal of sickness and health in terms of a botanical metaphor. As Uchibori observes:

"The vulnerability of plants, in an equatorial climate, is most evident when they are exposed to scorching heat. They become faded, withered and dried by the tropical sun. By contrast, coolness, particularly that brought by the rain, is thought to be essential to the growth of plants" (1978: 31).

These are the basic facts of vegetable life in the tropics, and are readily apparent to even the least botanically minded. In this respect, the images of coolness and heat provide perfect vehicles for the representation of good health and disease. At the same time, however, they also allow this botanical representation of sickness and mortality to be articulated with another frame of reference which is concerned with the circumstances of ritual harmony and discord.

To elaborate, the Iban distinguish between two states of being - one that is 'hot' or 'feverish' (*angat*); and one that is 'cool' or 'tranquil' (*celap*). Generally speaking, one finds that *celap* is regarded as an auspicious and favourable state or condition, while *angat* is seen to be inauspicious. Thus, as I mentioned earlier, the *pun rumah* or ritual leader of a longhouse must, among other things, possess both the charms (*pencelap rumah*) and the specialist knowledge to keep the community in a benign state of 'coolness'. One should of course be cautious in ascribing an absolute status to these evaluations for it is conceivable that in certain contexts the situation may be reversed. For example, one finds that magical charms are heated (*nangas*) to make them effective (*ngambi*) (Sather 1980a: 85), while a feverish state of *angat* - which is also associated with strength (*kering*), and forcefulness (*kasar*), and the right hand (*kanan*) (Sather 1977a: 159) - might be desirable in the realm of

warfare when directed against the enemy. On the whole though, in daily life it is the harmony and passiveness of *celap* which is sought.

When it comes to personal health and well-being then, there is no doubt that the Iban seek to keep the body in a 'cool' and 'tranquil' state, rather than one that is 'hot' and 'feverish'. For example, Freeman tells us that among the Baleh Iban the terms *angat* and *celap/chelap* are applied directly to the "temper of a human organism" (1970: 122). Thus "[w]hen in sound and normal health, a man's body is said to be *chelap*, or cool, and when it is afflicted by disease or disorder, *angat*, or feverish" (Freeman 1970: 122). Uchibori, on the other hand, reports that among the Layar Skrang these categories are not in fact applied to "the condition of an individual person" (1978: 32), but instead are more "concerned with socio-spatial settings" (1978: 32). He does, however, note that the terms *angat* and *celap* may be used in reference to physical sensations (Uchibori 1978: 32n4), and can thus be employed in symptomatic descriptions. In this respect there is of course an overlap between the two usages for if illness is understood to be an affliction of the *ayu* or *bungai* - or indeed the *semengat* for that matter - then health is at once both a physical and a metaphysical concern.

The important thing to note here, as far as our present interests are concerned, is that these categories may be readily integrated with a botanical scheme of things. This is not to suggest the terms *angat* and *celap* are derived from, or linked in some necessary way to, the organic imagery of the Iban conception of *ayu* and *bungai* - a dichotomy of hot and cool is found, after all, throughout South East Asia. Nevertheless, the Iban do quite explicitly make use of these categories in connection with the ritual treatment of an individual's plant counterpart.

In the first place, *celap* is generally regarded as being favourable to the healthy growth of plants, while *angat* is destructive in this respect. Thus Sather tells us that 'coolness', when associated with the earth, is a basic sign of fertility (1977a: 160). Similarly, the omen-bird Nendak - whose presence or call signifies this quality (*burong celap*) - is invariably sought as an auspicious sign in agricultural matters (eg: Perham 1882: 229; Howell 1977: 99; Jensen 1974: 161, 181, 189-90, 192, 193; Sather 1977a: 165; Richards 1981: 227)⁶. In other words, successful horticultural activities are typically associated with the 'coolness' of *celap*; *angat*, on the other hand, is regarded as being destructive to plant growth (Sather 1977a: 160).

As far as the conception of *ayu* and *bungai* are concerned, we have already seen that the *pagar api* - which is the material representation of these mystical entities - is frequently covered with a cloth, or *ikat* fabric, so as "to protect them from excessive heat and put them under a shade" (Uchibori 1978: 32; see also p. 139). More specifically, however, we are told that

"A rush and a banana plant are preferred as plants for representing the *bungai* or *ayu* in shamanic ceremonies because, the Iban say, they grow in cool or wet ground. Such plants are thought to bring about 'coolness' [i.e. *celap*]" (Uchibori 1978: 32).

In other words, the Iban quite explicitly make use of the dichotomy between *angat* and *celap* in connection with the performance of those rites that are to do with the care and health of an individual's 'plant soul'.

This overlap between the ritual categories of *angat* and *celap* and the Iban conception of sickness and health obviously has important implications in respect of Iban social ideology for as I mentioned earlier, much of Iban *adat*, or customary law, is underwritten by supernatural sanctions whereby transgressions of the social code are regarded as contributing to a state of *angat* (Freeman 1970: 122-3; Jensen 1974: 113; Sather 1980b: xxx). At the same time much of Iban religious ideology is similarly aligned with the concepts of *angat* and *celap*; indeed it is, perhaps, somewhat fallacious to distinguish between 'social' and 'religious' ideology in this instance for as Sather remarks:

"In contrast to the Malays, the Iban do not distinguish between *adat* and religious rules and practices; much of Iban *adat* is believed to be of religious origin or is concerned with ritual observances and other facets of religious life" (1980b: xii).

What is of particular interest to us here, however, is not so much the significance of *angat* and *celap* in relation to Iban religious beliefs or principles of social control, but rather the insight that these ideas gives us in respect of our understanding of the ritual significance of *pagar api*. By this I mean that on the one hand, we have the concept of *angat* as a ritual state or condition, and on the other, the image of heat and the inimical effect that this has on plant life. This suggests that we should in fact interpret the term *pagar api* as referring to a 'fence against fire', rather than a 'fence of fire', or 'fire fence', as is favoured in the ethnographic literature (Perham 1887: 90; Howell & Bailey 1900: 112; Nyuak 1977: 188; Gomes 1911: 166; Richards 1981: 242). Indeed Uchibori has actually suggested this title himself (1978: 99), but he does not elaborate

upon the possible significance of this interpretation in relation to the idea of the *bungai* as a plant and the conception of *angat* as a supernatural 'heat' or 'fever'. The argument that I therefore would like to put forward here, is that the *pagar api* - or perhaps more precisely, those rites in which the *pagar api* constitutes the focus of ritual attention - can be understood to provide some form of barrier or shield that protects the patient's delicate 'plant soul' from the injurious effects of a supernatural 'scorching'. In this respect the *pagar api* is quite literally a 'fence against fire'. In other words, one finds that once the *pagar api* is set in its proper context, neither the significance of the structure itself, nor the imagery of its title, need cause any bafflement. That it has done so in the past can only be attributed to a certain lack of awareness on the part of investigators as regards the relationship between the organic imagery of Iban metaphysics and the representation of supernatural danger as the generation of 'heat'.

Before leaving the subject of *pagar api* it must be pointed out that this structure is regarded as an essential component of any kind of *pelian* ritual, including those that are primarily concerned with the recovery of an errant *semengat*. For example, Howell & Bailey report that no *pelian* ceremony can ever take place without first a *pagar api* having been erected (1900: 112). What is more, in describing its construction the authors write that "midway up the shaft is hung a basket, called *seragindi*, containing raw and cooked rice, and chewing ingredients, placed there 'in order to entice the patient's soul'" (1900: 112-23). In other words, in this instance Howell & Bailey are clearly describing those rites which are designed to retrieve an absent *semengat*, rather than those which are

concerned with the care and health of *ayu*, as was so in the case of the *saut* ceremony.

In this context, then, it is interesting to note that Howell & Bailey refer to the *pagar api* as "the *manang*'s [shaman] bridge to Hades (Sebayan)" (1900: 112). Similarly, Uchibori tells us that the bore of the blow-pipe - which in his account of a *pagar api* constitutes the vertical column of the structure - represents the path by which the *semangat* of the shaman "reaches the highest parts of the universe" (1978: 99). In this light, it would appear that the *pagar api* may possess a two-fold significance in that on the one hand, it can be understood as a material representation of the patient's soul - be it *ayu* or *bungai* - while on the other, it acts as a link between the realm of everyday experiences and that of supernature.

This idea of the *pagar api* as a means of communication between the phenomenal world and the realm of supernature should not be seen as necessarily in conflict with its alternative significance as a material representation of the *ayu* or *bungai*. In the first place, the use of plant materials in the construction of *pagar api* can be readily incorporated into the idea of a link between this world and other, mystical regions of the Iban universe, for in everyday life felled trees are regularly employed by the Iban as ladders, bridges and even pathways. For example, the staircase for ascent into a longhouse consists of a single, knotted tree trunk (*tangga*), while ravines and rivers are bridged by a tree of appropriate length felled so as to fall across the chasm or water course. Similarly, on marshy ground tree trunks may be placed end to end to form a causeway to firmer terrain. Indeed one finds that the image of a tree as a bridge is in fact made quite explicit in many ritual contexts ⁷

including those for the return of an errant *semengat* when branches may be employed to serve as a 'spiritual ladder' (*tangga semengat*) by which the displaced *semengat* can re-enter its owner's body (Sather 1977a: 159). In short, trees and, in a ritual context, plants and branches, are frequently employed as a bridge of one sort or another, and in this light the *pagar api*, which is itself constructed from plant materials, can similarly be interpreted simply as a device for crossing the threshold between the world of everyday experience and the realm of the supernatural. In this respect it may therefore be found in any context that requires the Iban shaman to project his *semengat* into the latter domain, irrespective of whether his mission is to tend the ailing *ayu* (or *bungai*) of his patient, or else to retrieve his or her displaced *semengat*. As Richards himself observes in connection with the latter scenario "The *pagar api* represents the place of the *ayu* from where the *manang* sets out in company with Menjaya and other celestial *manang* he has called upon for help" (1981: 263). In this context then, the *pagar api* can be regarded simply as a "*pangkalan... manang*, i.e., [the] starting and ending point for [the shaman's] spiritual journey in search of the soul" (Richards 1981: 262).

It is evident, then, that the *pagar api* has a two-fold significance: on the one hand, it represents the site where the *ayu* or *bungai* grow (*bangkit*) and thus is visited in those rites that are aimed at fostering the growth of these mystical entities; on the other, as a specific location in the Iban mythical universe, the *pagar api* can also be regarded as a point of departure (and return) for the shaman who goes in search of the displaced *semengat* of the sick. Unfortunately, however, it is not clear from the existing evidence as to exactly what conditions determine the selection of one set of interpretations over another. That they should

exist side by side, however, is perhaps not surprising for they are both concerned with the treatment of pathological disorders and can thus be regarded as alternative perspectives on a single phenomenon. In this light, therefore, it is interesting to find that the distinction between *semengat* and *ayu* (or *bungai*) is not always clearly expressed. For example, Freeman reports the Baleh Iban as saying that "Our *semengat* and *ayu* share the same breath" ('*Semengat enggau ayu kitai saum seput*') (1970: 21), while Uchibori tells us that "the equation of *semengat* with *bungai* is not uncommon among ordinary people" (1978: 24). Similarly, Uchibori also mentions that one of his informants - who was himself a shaman, and therefore supposedly knowledgeable in such matters - told him that "the *bungai* was actually a cluster of the *semengat* of the members of the *bilek* family, gathered at the root of a fire-place post and attached to the stem of a plant-like object" (1978: 24). Uchibori himself remarks that "this testimony is significant because, as often as not, shamans trying to diagnose through the crystal *balu ilau* do not clearly distinguish the search for errant *semengat* from the examination of the *bungai* of the *bilek*" (Uchibori 1978: 24). In other words, there is a certain degree of overlap between the conception of *semengat* and the Iban idea of a 'plant soul', and this is of course reflected in the two-fold significance of the *pagar api*.

As to the selection of one frame of reference in favour of another it would appear that this may be negotiated by the shaman during the course of his *pelian* performance, but as I have already pointed out, we are at present unable to ascertain what factors or considerations are salient to his choice. What is important to realize here, however, is that in the past the botanical aspect of this nexus of ideas has seldom been

acknowledged in the ethnographic literature, except, in the few instances cited above. Instead we are presented with numerous and extensive accounts of the Iban shaman's search for, and recovery of, displaced *semangat*. Quite why the emphasis should fall in this way is unclear, but I have argued here that pre-existing scholastic interests may well have led investigators towards an understanding that has equated Iban theories of illness and disease with a more general South East Asian aetiology based upon the notion of a 'soul loss'. That is to say a superficial resemblance between certain aspects of the Iban attitude towards sickness and ill-health and those of other Malay and Indonesian peoples, may have induced a degree of oversight on the part of past ethnographers as to the possibility of alternative explanations of pathological disorders.

In brief summary then, my aim in this chapter has been to show how the physiology of plants and the circumstances of vegetative growth and decay have been incorporated by the Iban into an aetiological model of sickness and disease. This correspondence between man and plant takes two forms. First, that of exegetical statements by the Iban of this connection, and secondly, a positional use of plant materials in ritual contexts which either explicitly or implicitly presuppose this identification. In particular, I have concentrated upon the way in which these ideas are expressed through the Iban conception of a mystical 'plant soul' variously known as the *ayu* or *bungai*. In doing so I argued that certain aspects of Iban healing ceremonies (*pelian*) are most consistently understood by reference to this vegetative or botanical model of man's corporeal existence. In the final section of this chapter, however, I would like to pursue this argument in a slightly different direction,

namely in those contexts where human existence is not identified with the notion of a 'plant soul' as such, but rather is perceived in more abstract terms.

***Ayu* as an abstract concept:**

It will be recalled that among the Layar Skrang Iban, the term *ayu* describes a "rather abstract concept which refers vaguely to a person's state of life" (Uchibori 1978: 25; see p. 161). Alternatively, it may also be identified with a person's lifespan (*umor*) (Uchibori 1978: 25). In other words, in this particular instance there is no suggestion that the term *ayu* is in any way related to the idea of a 'plant soul' or vegetable life image as it is among the Baleh Iban and those of other regions. Nevertheless, despite the abstract nature of the concept of *ayu* in this context, one finds that at a ritual level those ceremonies that are to do with procuring longevity and life-long health are still very much dependant on the idea of the plant as an image for the representation of human life.

For example, Uchibori describes the Layar-Skrang rite of *nupi* or *bumbu ayu* - which is held in order to strengthen the constitution of a sickly child - as follows:

"a rush or a banana plant is put in a jar ... together with the hair of the child and of his father and mother, and with a variety of ornamental objects like beads, bells and cowries. The mother, having the child on her lap, sits by the side of the jar. A shaman, singing a song to summon the mythical shamans, walks around this ritual apparatus and the mother and the child. Next morning, the stem of the rush or banana plant used in the ceremony is planted in the open space (*tengan laman*) near the longhouse ...[and].. a fence is made around this plant to show that it was used in the ceremony and that

it should be allowed to grow (*nguan menoa*) without disturbance" (1978: 25-6).

It will be immediately apparent that there are a number of striking parallels between the longevity rites of *nupi ayu* and the ritual procedures that restore health and vigour to the *bungai* of the sick. Given this general similitude, I would like accordingly, to draw attention to the actual terms employed in the designation of the former ceremony. The term *nupi* - meaning to feed, rear, or provide for (Richards 1981: 237) - can evidently be taken as referring to the future life and health of the child concerned. However, the alternative term *bumbu* - is translated by Howell & Bailey as specifically meaning "to cover (with sheet or blanket)" (1900: 28; see also Richards 1981: 55) - which strongly calls to mind the ritual wrapping of an individual's plant counterpart (*ayu* and *bungai* alike) in an *ikat* fabric to protect it from the fierce heat of the tropical sun (above). In the latter instance it is especially important to note that one of Uchibori's informants actually mentions that it should be a *buloh* bamboo which is subsequently planted outside the longhouse (1978: 26) for this is the very same image as is employed by both the Baleh and the Layar-Skrang Iban to describe the vegetable form of the *ayu* and *bungai* when conceived as mystical entities (see above). In short, it emerges that there is a ritual repertoire, or vocabulary, that is common to both sets of life-enhancing procedures, irrespective of whether we are dealing with a mystical counterpart in the form of a plant or the conception of life in a more abstract sense.

Pursuing this line of enquiry further, one finds that Harrisson & Sandin have described a very similar ritual among the Saribas Iban, namely

that of *pelian besagu ayu* (1966: 119). In this instance the authors relate the term *ayu* to *gayu* meaning a 'long life', and this leads them to translate the title of this ceremony as "to lift up prayers for a long life" (see pp. 160-161)². Again there is no mention of *ayu* referring to any particular entity and one can only assume that this is because the Saribas understanding of the term resembles that of their neighbours, the Layar-Skrang Iban (i.e. *ayu* as an abstract concept). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that plant images still play a central role in this ceremony which, like the Layar-Skrang rite of *nupi ayu*, is designed to foster the health of a sickly child. In this particular instance, we are told that on the morning after the ceremony - which, like most Iban rituals is performed at night - the shaman "slashes the comb of a cock (*manok tawai*) and smears a 5 feet pole with the blood; then swears this cock must be left to die a natural death, (thus insuring the child's life)" (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 119). Harrisson & Sandin mention elsewhere that this "pole" - which they refer to as the *pun ayu* - is, in fact, made from the stem of a *bangkit* banana tree which is identified with that used by Bunsu Petara in the creation of man (1966: 186). This immediately calls to mind the comment of Richards that "in rites for the *ayu*, a 'soul post' (*tiang ayu*) of a banana (*pisang*) stem is set up to represent the *pisang bangkit* used by the Creator (Entalla) to make men" (1981: 262; see above). Furthermore, the use of the term *pun*, rather than *tiang*, in this context may itself be significant in that while *pun* can mean origin, foundation or basis (see p. 98), botanically speaking it describes the stem of a plant or the trunk of a tree (Howell & Bailey 1900: 133a; Freeman 1981: 31). In other words, the suggestion here is that in the rites of *besagu ayu*, the *pun ayu* may actually be conceived as a vegetal representation of an

individual's life, or being, despite the fact that the term *ayu* in this instance is held to be entirely abstract in its conception.

Such an interpretation is supported by the ethnographic data for Harrison & Sandin tell us that at the conclusion of the *pelian besagu ayu* ceremonies the banana stem or *pun ayu* is "planted" outside the longhouse and surrounded with *sabang* plants (*Cordyeline* spp.) "as a memorial to the occasion" (1966: 119). This is of course very similar to the concluding procedures of the Layar Skrang rite of *nupi ayu* (see above), but what is especially interesting here, is that both ceremonies recall certain features of the Saribas pregnancy ritual of *pelian bejereki* as recently described by Sandin (1978). In this particular instance we are told that the *Cordyeline* plants which are used in this ceremony are actually identified with the life of the unborn child and that they are referred to in this context as *sabang ayu* (Sandin 1978: 59). Sandin translates this title as "the cordyeline of longevity" (1978: 59), and he tells us that on the morning following the *pelian*, they are taken and planted outside the longhouse (1978: 78). Sandin adds that once planted these *sabang* should not be disturbed for they are said "to confer longevity (*gayu*) on the child in the woman's womb" (1978: 78). Clearly the banana plant or rush stems that are planted at the end of *pelian besagu ayu* and *nupi ayu* ceremonies - which are similarly intended to promote longevity - may also be thought of in the same way. In short, one finds that in each instance one is dealing with a vegetable representation of human existence, in which the future life and health of the individual is correlated with the healthy growth of plants.

What is of particular interest to us here, however, is that in these instances the association between man and plant is not attached to the

concept of a plant counterpart. On the contrary, the term *ayu*, in these latter contexts, is understood to refer to 'life' in a purely abstract sense. Nevertheless, one still finds that plant images play a central role in the ritual promotion of longevity, which again suggests that the identification between the life of an individual and the healthy growth of plants is in fact drawn from a more general set of equations or parallels between the existence of man and the natural realm of plants. In this respect, it is important to note Richards' observation that the term *sukat*, meaning a measure, when used in connection with a person's life span, is often "described as [a] plant for each living mortal, tended by *Menyayan* ([a] celestial *manang* [shaman]) on a hill near that of the *ayu*, but invisible to *manang* in their *batu karas* (seeing stone)" (1981: 354). From this it would appear that in some areas the concept of longevity is itself actualized as a mystical entity that takes the form of a plant. This does not, however, seem to apply in the case of the Saribas and Layan Skrang ceremonies described above, and so one can only deduce that the use of plant images in this particular instance, stems from a cultural predisposition that favours the portrayal of man's existence in this world in terms of epistemological categories that are drawn from the domain of plants. In short, one finds that plant life, and the circumstances affecting the growth of plants, provide the Iban with an iconographic set of images for the collective representation of human existence, conceived in both an abstract sense, and simultaneously, at a physiological level of explanation.

Conclusion

My primary aim, in this chapter, has been to explore the Iban perception of a correspondence, or sympathetic relationship between the corporeal existence of man and the physiology of plants. At its simplest, this association of man and plant takes the form of a metaphorical identification in which various physiological conditions or states of being are described in terms of a botanical vocabulary. In those rites that are to do with the promotion of longevity, this metaphorical association is physically represented through the ritual use of various plant species, whose subsequent growth is identified with the future health and well being of the individuals concerned. In other instances, however, the relationship between man and plants is imbued with a more profound significance in the form of a supposed correlation between personal health and the state of growth of a mystical plant, or vegetable 'life image', known as the *ayu* or *bungai*. It seems then, that in this latter context the postulated correspondence between man and plant is regarded not just simply as being metaphorical in nature, but rather is conceived in quasi-physical terms.

These ideas should not be seen in isolation for they are in fact part of a far more general set of associations between man and his natural environment wherein the world of plants is seen as providing a rich and vivid source of images and categories for the collective representations of various different aspects of the Iban experience of life, and ultimately death (see below). In this particular instance, the processes of vegetative growth and decay provide the Iban with a theoretical framework for an indigenous aetiology of sickness and disease which is subsequently reflected in the horticultural nature of many Iban healing ceremonies. At the same time, the organic nature of this imagery allows these ideas to be

incorporated into a wider framework relating to ritual states of being - namely the Iban dichotomy between situations that are 'hot' and generally unfavourable or unhealthy (*angat*), and those that are 'cool' and tranquil (*celap*).

This extensive use of a botanical idiom in the Iban collective representation of health, sickness and mortality, is, I have argued, readily discernible in the ethnographic literature. Nevertheless it is an area of study that in the past has been largely ignored, or overlooked (save by Uchibori), and the ideas that are involved have tended to remain somewhat obscure. For this reason then, one of my principal concerns in this chapter has been to draw together the various sources of information of this subject and to present this collation of data as evidence for the widespread and systematic application of a botanical metaphor in the Iban portrayal of life and death as a physiological process. In doing so I have sought to establish the quasi-physical nature - at a representational level at least - of the Iban self-identification with the realm of plants; it is now my intention in following chapters to trace the various social and ritual implications of this set of ideas as they unfold through other areas of Iban cultural discourse.

NOTES - Chapter IV

1. One should note that the botanical name for this species of tree is in fact derived from the Malay and Iban term for blood (root form - *darah*).
2. See Gomes (1911: 173-4).
3. c.f. the term *ayu* in Sanskrit means 'life' or 'vitality' (Richards 1981: 20).
4. Manang Menyaya is also said to look after the health of *ayu* (Richards 1981: 20).
5. *Betepas* means 'to sweep' or 'brush (away)' (Richards 1981: 383-84), and in this instance evidently refers to the weeding activities of the shaman. Howell & Bailey also mention this ceremony in their dictionary, which they interpret as being "to sweep off evil effects or to do away with a bad dream" (1900: 121), but I suspect that Perham's version is more accurate.
6. One should note in this connection that while the other major omen-birds are invariably characterized as great warriors and headhunters, Nendas alone is said to be a 'quiet-spoken, stay-at-home farmer' (Richards 1972: 318).
7. For example, cut branches may be used to provide a staircase for the gods (*tangga petara*), by which they may descend to participate in various festivals and rituals, and to receive their offerings (Sather 1977a: 158 n.9, 158-5).
8. Richards, on the other hand, interprets this ritual as being quite literally "to raise the spirit" (1981: 318).

CHAPTER V.

THE PLANT AS AN IMAGE OF FAMILY UNITY AND CONTINUITY

Introduction

In the last chapter I argued for the importance of *ayu* and *bungai* in connection with an Iban aetiology of disease and mortality. In this chapter, however, I would like to follow a rather different direction and examine the social implications of this set of ideas. Whereas before we were concerned simply with the significance of *ayu* and *bungai* in relation to personal health and well-being, in this instance I shall argue that the organic imagery of these concepts can also be understood as a reflection of Iban attitudes towards the individual's place in society and the role of the *bilek*-family as a social institution.

Uchibori tells us that the longhouse community is often likened, or referred to, as a tree (*sekayau*), and that this can be understood as a metaphor for the unity of the longhouse as a single social entity (1978: 93 n9). The building itself - as a structure - is similarly referred to in arboreal terms, with a base (*pun*), trunk (*batang*), and tip (*ujong*) (Uchibori 1978: 63), and these designations are themselves reflected in the design of the longhouse and the arrangement of the timbers that are used in its construction (Uchibori 1978: 93 n9). Furthermore, these spatial

orientations have ritual connotations wherein the *pun* or basal end is associated with benign circumstances - such as the arrival of the gods on the occasion of a festival (*gawai*) - and the *ujung* end, or tip, with those that are 'polluting' - for example, the departure of a corpse for burial (Uchibori 1978: 63)¹. In short, one finds that the arboreal conception of the longhouse community as a social entity is at the same time reiterated in the construction and spatial organization of the longhouse building as a physical entity.

This idea of a consolidated longhouse society is also apparent in the ritual status of the longhouse as a single community, which, depending on the circumstances, may be either 'hot' and 'feverish' (*angat*), or else 'cool' and 'tranquil' (*celap*). As I mentioned earlier, these categories can be readily integrated into a botanical scheme of things, whereby 'cool' conditions are seen as favouring the healthy 'growth' of society, while those that are 'heated' induce disease and 'blight'. In this respect, the activities of individuals are ultimately identified with the interests and the well being of society as a whole, in that the inauspicious consequences of *adat* transgressions may radiate outwards from their point of origin to eventually encompass the entire community. Conversely, positive action is seen to benefit the welfare of all, which may shed some light on the use of the term *pun* in the designation of Iban leaders, as for example, in the title of *pun rumah* - community founder and ritual specialist; *pun pindah* - migration leader; or *pun ngayau* - war leader (see p. 100). By this I mean that while on the one hand *pun* refers to the origin, basis or foundation of something, its "root meaning", according to Freeman, is that of a "*fons et origo*, or *stem*, as of a *tree*, from which the development of any kind of activity springs" (1981: 31; my emphasis). In other words, the term has

distinctly organic and vegetable connotations - connotations which, it is suggested, are of particular significance in relation to the collective representation of society as a 'tree', in that they metaphorically identify Iban leaders as a source of 'growth', or new development, in the life of the longhouse community, be it as the instigators of migrations into virgin lands or as the founders and ritual inaugurators of new settlements.

Briefly then, the longhouse community as a whole may be conceived as a single organic entity with its members linked with one another as the leaves and branches of a tree are attached to its trunk. Within this unity, however, there is also division, in that Iban society is, for most purposes at least, fragmented into autonomous households, or *bilek*-families. It is these family units which ultimately are the real focus of Iban social life and my aim in this chapter, therefore, is to demonstrate how the realities of this social situation are actualized and made known at an ideological level through the use of plant images and botanical categories of explanation. Accordingly, it is to the idea of the *bilek*-family as a 'plant', or 'plant-cluster', that I now turn.

Ayu and bungai as metaphors for family unity

The *bilek*-family, as we have seen, is an economically self-sufficient and jurally independent entity which, in the absence of any formal descent group such as a lineage or clan, constitutes the focus of an individual's loyalty and interest. In these respects it is arguably the very foundation upon which Iban society is built and my intention in this chapter is to demonstrate how the special significance of the *bilek*-family as a social

institution is expressed through the organic imagery that surrounds the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai* (hereafter the term *ayu* should be understood as referring to the Baleh Iban sense of the term unless otherwise stated). In this instance, the postulated relationship between man and plant serves as a social metaphor that describes the position of the individual vis à vis his family and the rest of society.

Freeman tells us that among the Baleh Iban, "[t]he *ayu* of each *bilek*-family are conceived as of growing in a separate and compact clump, and when a child is born a new shoot appears at the base of the clump, just as it does with the bamboo plant itself [the *ayu* being likened to *buloh* bamboo in the form that they take - see p. 159]" (1970: 21). Similarly, Uchibori reports that the Layar Skrang Iban conceive of the collective *bungai* of the *bilek*-family as emerging from a single stem or stalk (*pun*) (1978: 22). Each individual in the family is identified with a particular part of this mythical plant, and although the botanical nature of these individual parts remains unspecified, they may be thought of, according to one of Uchibori's informants, as like leaves attached to the stem of the *bungai* (Uchibori 1978: 22). In this respect, Uchibori argues that "the *bungai*... symbolizes quite overtly the unity of the *bilek*-family ... [while] ... its supposed location, a fire-place post [see p. 161] suggests the functional aspect of a *bilek*-family as a household unit" (1978: 22).

To elaborate, the idea that the collective *ayu* or *bungai* of individual family members grow together - either in clumps, or as parts of a single plant structure - can be understood as an assertion relating to the nature of the *bilek*-family as a social institution. That is to say, the vegetal imagery surrounding the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai* can, in

this instance, be interpreted as a reflection of Iban attitudes towards the *bilek*-family whereby the bond uniting family members - which as we have seen, is derived primarily from a principle of co-residence - is represented as being most fundamental in nature, comparable to the integral relationship that exists between the individual parts of a single whole. In other words, a plant can be thought of as an organic whole whose parts - be they leaves, shoots, flowers, or whatever -are necessarily related to one another by virtue of their collective role as elements in a single organism, and in this respect, to represent the lives and health of individual family members in terms of these images is to argue for the 'organic solidarity' of the family unit, and to establish the *bilek* as a discrete entity vis à vis the rest of society.

These themes are clearly expressed in the context of the rite of *nusop ayu*. Freeman tells us that

"The purpose of the *nusop ayu* ritual, which often accompanies adoption, is the cutting away of the child's *ayu* from the *ayu* clump of his natal group, and the replanting of it with the *ayu* clump of his adoptive *bilek*-family. The transplanting ritual is performed by a shaman, who receives a special fee in return for his services. The child himself is given three articles: a bush-knife (*duku*), a small jar (*jagok*), and a fathom of cloth. Each of these objects has a symbolic meaning. The knife symbolizes the cutting away of the child's *ayu*; the jar (termed in this context, *karong semengat*) is a cask providing magical protection for the soul, or *semengat*, of the child; while the length of cloth forms a covering for the freshly transplanted *ayu* of the child, to shade it and so prevent it from becoming shrivelled in the heat of the sun" (1970: 21)

As Freeman himself points out, this ceremony reflects the idea that in terms of inheritance and succession within the family, "claims based on birth or adoption are of equal validity" (1970: 22). What is more, the

rites of *nusop ayu* may also be performed in connection with the change of residence that accompanies marriage (i.e, on behalf of the partner who is going to live with the family of his or her spouse) (Richards 1981: 237). In this instance, the principle of equal inheritance and succession is thereby ritually extended to include affinal members of the *bilek* also.

The rite of *nusop ayu* can be divided into two parts, or aspects. On the one hand, there is the idea of separation whereby the individual is removed from association with the members of his or her natal *bilek*-family; while on the other, there is an idea of incorporation, whereby this displaced person is then integrated into the social space of a new *bilek*-family - either that of their spouse or else their adoptive 'kin'. In these two respects, the transplanting imagery of the *nusop ayu* rite can be understood as both re-affirming the organic solidarity of the *bilek*-family as a discrete unit, while at the same time confirming the equal status of all family members irrespective of whether they were born into the *bilek*, or else recruited from the outside.

A similar set of ideas and interests can be discerned in the mortuary rites of *serara*' which are concerned with the ritual separation of the dead from the living. This ceremony is especially interesting in that it both draws together the physiological and sociological aspects of the Iban conception of a plant counterpart, and at the same time plays upon the images of coolness and heat as metaphors for auspicious and inauspicious states of being. It is therefore worthwhile examining the particulars of this ritual in some detail for they provide a good illustration of the way in which the organic imagery of Iban collective representations relating to life and death can be made to serve a number of ends.

Death and the rites of *serara*'

The occurrence of death is regarded as a generally inauspicious state of affairs. Emotionally it arouses feelings of 'discomfort' and 'unease' (*enda' nyami*) (Uchibori 1978: 45), while ritually it generates 'heat' or 'fever' (*angat*). Furthermore, the corpse is regarded as "a source of pollution" (Uchibori 1978: 52), while the 'ghosts' of the recent dead - who are classified as *antu*: i.e in the same category as capricious and generally malevolent spirits and demons - provoke fear and anxiety (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 298; Uchibori 1978: 221). Thus Howell mentions that the *antu* of the recently deceased "is dangerous to the living" (1977: 68), while Sandin reports that the dead can actually "curse" those who survive them (1961: 174). The Iban also say that the dead may sometimes set out to deliberately confuse the living (*ngachau*) (Uchibori 1978: 221), while untoward occurrences such as the mysterious loss of rice, the disappearance of jars, or secret harvesting at night, are frequently attributed to the mischievous activities of the dead (Uchibori 1978: 221-2; Sather 1980a: 76n 13). In particular, it is felt that if the dead do not receive the correct burial and mortuary treatment, they will become 'spirits of wastefulness' (*antu rua*) and in this capacity prey upon the rice stocks of the community (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 301-2; Uchibori 1978: 222). Most importantly, however, the presence of the dead is thought to generate 'heat' (*angat*) which, as we have seen, is inimical to life and health². In this respect, the incursion of death into the sphere of the living is conceived of as endangering the lives and well being of all those who come into contact with the deceased, and while family members

are most at risk in this situation, the contagious effects of death may, in some instances, extend to include the entire community.

The latter idea is clearly revealed in the myth of Serapoh, which tells of a time when the Iban were ignorant of the ritual procedures that should be carried out following the occurrence of a death in the longhouse (Morgan 1968: 148; Jensen 1974: 93-4; Uchibori 1978: 215-16; Richards 1981: 342). According to contemporary Iban, their ancestors did not 'look after' (*ngintu*) their dead properly (Uchibori 1978: 216) and as a result they were forever plagued by a critically high rate of mortality. In some instances whole longhouses were brought to the brink of extinction by this state of affairs, but eventually the spirit Putang Raga intervened, revealing the correct mortuary rites and procedures to an individual by the name Serapoh, and thus averting the disastrous consequences of a succession of unattended deaths. Uchibori comments that

"This myth is straightforward as an aetiological account. What it tells us is that a person's death is a danger to the survivors and that this danger is lessened only through well arranged cultural means, that is, the mortuary rituals" (1978: 216)

In short, it is clear that the presence of death is regarded by the Iban as a highly unfavourable state and one that can only be removed by the proper separation of the dead from the living. In this respect, the rite of *serara* - which means quite literally 'to separate' - plays a crucial role in Iban mortuary practices.

The rite *serara'* is well documented in the ethnographic literature (Howell 1977: 69; Nyuak 1977: 188; Freeman 1970: 36; Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 307-9; Uchibori 1978: 99 seq; Richards 1981: 342-3; Sandin 1980: 38-39). For example, Freeman tells us that when a person dies, a *manang*, or shaman^a, is commissioned "to carry out the remarkable *baserara* rite in which the soul-substitute (*ayu*) of the dead man is ritually cut away from the *ayu* of the surviving members of the family" (1970: 36). Similarly, Richards writes that *serara' bangkit* is a "rite performed by *manang* after a death ... to separate the dead 'plant soul' (*bungai layu*) from its clump of living *ayu*" (1981: 342)⁴, while Nyuak, who describes the *ayu* as the "shade of the deceased", explains that "this ceremony is supposed to separate the soul of the deceased from those of the living" (1977: 188). By far the best and most detailed account, however, is Uchibori's description of this ritual as performed by the present-day Layar Skrang Iban.

Uchibori tells us that the rite of *serara'* is usually held at the end of an initial period of strict mourning (*ulit*), although frequent ghostly apparitions (*ngemba*) may bring the date forward. In modern times, the period of *ulit* usually lasts for about a month, and Uchibori writes that during this time, "the *semengat* of the deceased is supposed to be together (*begulai*) with those of the living" (1978: 95). As a result, the Iban say that the dead often do not realize that they have died, and it is thought that if this state of ignorance is allowed to persist, then they may subsequently claim their share of the harvest and consume the unreaped rice in the fields (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 302-3;

Uchibori 1978: 95). This is evidently a very real concern - given that the subsistence economy of the Iban is almost entirely based upon the cultivation of rice - but at the same time, there is considerable anxiety attached to the idea that "the bereaved are in constant danger due to the incomplete separation between them and the deceased" (Uchibori 1978: 95).

Although the myth of Serapoh provides 'historical' evidence of the reality of this threat, the contagious effects of death are actually given expression through the vegetable imagery of the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai*, which are described as wilting or drooping (*layu*) in the same way that diseased and dying vegetation collapses in the heat of the sun (Uchibori 1978: 22-23, 94-5, 183). In this context, the inimical effect of heat can of course be understood both as a representation of pathological disorder, and also as relating to the inauspicious - i.e, 'heated' (*angat*) - circumstances of death. It is felt that this moribund condition may spread to the rest of the family's *ayu* or *bungai* (which, it will be recalled, are said to grow either in clumps or as parts of a single organic structure), hence the necessity of the *serara'* ceremony which separates the blighted *ayu* shoot, or *bungai* leaf, from the main stem (*pun*) of the *bilek* plant.

In its essential features the rite of *serara'* resembles a *pelian* healing ceremony in that a *pagar api* is erected in the gallery of the longhouse and that this structure is the focus of ritual attention during the course of the ceremony (Nyuak 1977: 188; Uchibori 1978: 99ff.; Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 307-8; Richards 1981: 243, 342-3). In Uchibori's account a blow-pipe is placed upright in a small jar and a bamboo shoot is lashed to this vertical column. The base of this edifice is then wrapped with black calico, and a number of ritual objects, required during the

course of the ceremony, are either attached to, or placed around, the *pagar api* (Uchibori 1978: 98-99). Many of these ritual accessories also feature in *pelian* ceremonies and are related, in both instances, to the notion of a supernatural journey, undertaken by the *manang* during the performance of the ritual. For example, a plate serves as a boat, a knife as its paddle, and a bowl as its bailer (Uchibori 1978: 99; see also Jensen 1974: 148). There are also offerings for the deceased and an areca nut (*pinang*) which is split into ten pieces. Five of these pieces are placed in a bowl with a small amount of cooked rice and are said to represent the healthy lives of the surviving *bilek family* members; the other five are wrapped in a banana leaf and put with the offerings for the dead (Uchibori 1978: 97).

As far as our present interests are concerned, however, by far the most important aspect of this ceremony is the key role of plant images in the representation of life and death. In this instance the ritual attention is focused on a bamboo shoot, representing the collective *bungai* (or *ayu*) of the *bilek family*, and the climax of the ceremony is reached when the shaman cuts a small piece of skin (*kerupai*) from this shoot and disposes of it, together with the offerings for the dead, through a small hole cut in the floor of the gallery (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 308-9; Uchibori 1978: 103-4). These procedures can be interpreted as follows: the sliver of bamboo represents the *bungai* of the deceased - or at least that part of the family *bungai* pertaining to the dead person - and through his actions the *manang* physically separates the dead from the living. The hole in the floor is then ritually sealed, either with the leaf of a *lemayang* palm (*Salacca* spp.) (Uchibori 1978: 104) which signifies the interface between this world and the next (see p. 132); or

else with aromatic bark (*kulit lukai*) (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 309) which is frequently used to ward off unwanted spirit beings (Morgan & Beavitt 1972: 290; Richards 1981: 197). In this way the link between the dead person and surviving members of his or her *bilek family* is permanently severed, the deceased being now firmly established in the Iban afterworld.

To summarize briefly, the rite of *serara'* is very similar in many respects to the *nusop ayu* ritual mentioned earlier. Both ceremonies are concerned with a change of status; a change that is brought about by adoption or marriage on the one hand, or by death on the other. In the latter instance, one finds that in the case of the Iban mortuary rites, the vegetable imagery attached to the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai* provides, not only an aetiological account of death as a physiological process, but also a set of images for the representation of death as a sociological event. In this respect, the ritual pruning of the *bilek family bungai* stem, or *ayu* cluster, can be understood as a rite of passage reflecting the change of status that accompanies death: the dead are no longer useful or productive members of the *bilek*, but on the contrary, they are a source of danger and must be placed at a safe distance. In carrying this out, the rite of *serara'* re-affirms the unity and integrity of the *bilek family* as a social unit, and stresses the life-sustaining links between individual family members through the idea that death threatens the health of one and all.

The *ayu* or *bungai* as a metaphor for family continuity

We have seen that the vegetable imagery of the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai* can be understood as a metaphorical representation of family unity and solidarity. One can, however, discern another theme or principle running through this association of images and ideas, and this is one of social continuity. Freeman has written that there is "no semblance in Iban society of any sort of unilateral, exogamous descent group of the type usually described as a lineage, or clan" (1970: 67). Instead, it is the *bilek* family that fulfills many of the roles that are traditionally associated with descent groups as described in the anthropological literature. As we have seen, in this instance, the key principle that organizes the distribution of rights and responsibilities within society is one of residence, rather than that of consanguinity. Nevertheless, one still finds that the Iban do in fact subscribe to a notion of social continuity in as far as the *bilek* family is concerned. In this particular instance, however, it is expressed not in terms of a 'blood line', but rather as a form of organic development or growth.

The *bilek* family as we have seen, is a corporate, allodial unit, in which property - be it of utilitarian, economic, prestige, or ritual value, is jointly owned. This means that with the passage of time, the *bilek* apartment and its estate passes not to individuals, but rather is inherited collectively by generations of family members. In this context then, the *bilek* family is imbued with a transtemporal character in that it may be regarded as a semi-permanent feature of the longhouse community, which is 'filled' at any one moment in time by a group of individuals who are related to each other by ties of consanguinity,

affinity, adoption, or simply co-residence, and who have inherited the apartment and its wealth from an immediately ascendent generation of owners.

The idea of the continuity of the *bilek* family in future generations is of the utmost importance to the Iban. As Freeman has observed:

"the *bilek-family* persists through time as an allodial unit. If this process is to continue without intermission, the family must perpetuate itself; each generation must produce the children who are to inherit the *bilek* and its valuables in the next. It is possible for a family to fail in this task, and so to become extinct. The Iban use the word *punas*, meaning sterile, to describe this event, as in the phrase: '*Bilek sida udah punas*' ('Their *bilek-family* has become extinct'). It must not be thought however that the extinction of a *bilek-family* is a common process; on the contrary, such a happening is extremely rare, for every effort is made to avoid so ignominious a fate" (1970: 18-19)⁵.

This desire to have successors who will inherit the *bilek* is not simply the manifestation of a general love of family life or a reflection of some philanthropic attitude towards the members of succeeding generations; rather it stems from a personal interest and concern for future well being both in this life and the hereafter. In the first instance, given the independence and economic self-sufficiency of the *bilek* family, it is evidently essential that there should be younger members in order to care for the senior generations as they are overtaken by old age and infirmity. Perhaps more important, however, as far as the Iban themselves are concerned, is the dependance of senior members of the *bilek* upon their successors to perform the correct mortuary rites on their behalf when they are dead.

This latter condition is of the utmost significance. For example, Freeman tells us that

"An elder looks to his children, and to his grandchildren, within the *bilek-family*, to care for him in his old age, and to perform faithfully the elaborate mortuary rites which must accompany his passing from this world to the next. To the Iban these mortuary rites are a matter of supreme importance, and all the senior surviving members of the *bilek-family* are expected to join in their faithful performance" (1970: 31)

The mortuary rites of which he speaks include the proper disposal of the corpse, the performance of the *sabak* funeral dirge that assists the *semengat* of the deceased on its journey to the Iban afterworld; the provision of burial property; the rites of *serara'*; and finally, the commemoration of the deceased at the periodic festival that is held in honour of the dead (*gawai antu*). I have already referred to the principle aims of the *sabak* death dirge (p. 129) and discussed the importance of the rites of *serara'* (above), and so I will restrict myself here to the consideration of the significance of burial property (*baya'*) and the role of commemoration (*perantu*) in Iban eschatological beliefs.

I mentioned earlier that the Iban afterworld - Sebayan - in most respects is regarded as an almost exact replica of this world, albeit a much improved version. One therefore finds that an important part of Iban mortuary practices involves making sure that the dead individual is adequately provided for in the next life. This includes equipping the deceased with all the necessary accoutrements of daily existence and in publicly proclaiming his or her status through commemoration. These

requirements are met by surviving members of the *bilek* family or their successors if they too have passed on before fulfilling their obligations.

Looking first at the idea of burial property (*baya'*), Freeman tells us that

"The provision of adequate burial property is, to the Iban, a major responsibility. It is, in fact, a final inheritance: the equipping of a person with all the necessities of social and economic life in the After-World" (1970: 36).

This includes clothing, utensils, ornaments, weapons, jars, gongs, fabrics and even rice seed, in order to ensure that the recently deceased will be content in his new surroundings and want for nothing. At the same time, this collection must also accurately reflect the status that the dead person had attained during his or her lifetime. Thus Freeman writes:

"if a man has attained renown in this world, his *baiya* must reflect this fact. Thus, a man of prestige - a successful head-hunter for example - is clad for his burial in a beautifully woven jacket, and his corpse is ornamented with costly bangles and beads; at his side is laid his curved, long-bladed sword in its sheath richly embellished with Malay or Chinese silver-work, and in and about his grave are strewn numerous other valuables. A man of fame and substance makes his exit from this world and his entry into the next surrounded by all the material trappings of his earthly status" (1970: 36).

It will be apparent then, that the provision of adequate burial property is of the greatest importance in the context of Iban eschatology and mortuary practices ⁶. No less significant, however, is the subsequent

commemoration of the dead at a *gawai antu* festival. The latter are held only periodically with intervals of several years, even decades, elapsing between successive ceremonies (Perham 1884: 295; Gomes 1911: 142, 216; Freeman 1970: 39; Uchibori n.d.: 9; Richards 1981: 96). That this is so is due, at least in part, to the enormous expenditure that is involved on the part of the mourners to ensure that the dead are suitably honoured (Richards 1981: 96). In this instance, almost everyone in the community is drawn into the preparations for every *bilek* family is virtually certain to have lost at least one member through death since the time when the festival was last celebrated.

In effect the *gawai antu* marks the end of all obligations towards the dead, for up until that time, those families with uncommemorated dead must still observe various ritual requirements on behalf of their former *bilek* companions (Uchibori n.d.: 3-4). In particular, the *gawai antu* marks the formal ending of mourning (*ulit*) and the release of widows and widowers from their affinal relationship with the deceased (although it is in fact possible to re-marry earlier, provided certain reparatory rites have been observed) (Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896 I: 130; Chambers in Ling Roth 1896 I: 156; Nyuak 1977: 190-91; Freeman 1970: 39; Sandin 1968a: 43; 1980: 30-32; Uchibori 1978: 123 nd: 36; Richards 1981: 24, 97). But while this culmination of mourning and widowhood undoubtedly brings relief to many members of the longhouse community, they are not the principal objectives of the festival as far as the Iban are concerned. Instead one finds that the chief aim of the *gawai antu* is again to ensure that those who have died in recent years are adequately provided for and comfortably established in the after-world.

This view is particularly evident in the latter stages of the festival when specially constructed model houses (*sungkup*), complete with furnishings, ornaments, utensils and so forth (*ma*), are placed at the graveyard by each family specifically for the use of their deceased predecessors (Perham 1884: 297-298; Chambers in Ling Roth 1896 I: 258; Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896 I: 130; Howell 1977: 79; Nyuak 1977: 190; Gomes 1977: 75-76; 1911: 142, 218; Freeman 1970: 37; Sandin 1961: 174 ff.; Uchibori n.d.: 13 ff.; Richards 1981: 198, 356) At the same time it also underlies the ritual significance of the celebration of a "sacred symposium" (Perham 1884: 298) in which the dead are honoured with rice wine (*tuak*) and their lifetime's achievements 'toasted' by leading members of the community (Perham 1884: 298; Gomes 1911: 218; Sandin 1961: 170-1, 186-88; 1963: 321-22, 325; Uchibori n.d. 27 ff.; Richards 1981: 4; 121-22).

The latter ceremony, which recognizes the individual status of each deceased person, is particularly associated with the construction of *garong* baskets. These are cylindrical containers made of wicker-work, which are used to encase the hollow bamboo stems filled with rice wine that is dedicated to the dead (*ai garong*) (Sandin 1961: 177-8; 1963; Uchibori n.d.: 16 seq.; Richards 1981: 95, 97). At least one of these 'memorial baskets' should be made for each dead person who is to be commemorated at the *gawai antu* but one finds that *garong* baskets are in fact made to a number of different designs ranked in a series of seven ascending grades that reflect the social status of the deceased. These grades are designated 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9, according to the complexity of their construction. The latter two are of special interest, being reserved for those rare and outstanding individuals - for example, great war leaders - who, having been honoured once with a five-fold basket

(*garong ranggong lima*), are now being commemorated at a *gawai antu* for a second or third time. (Sandin 1963: 323-4). The understanding here is that subsequent re-commemorations will further enhance the reputation and prestige of the deceased in the after world. Thus Sandin informs us that it was customary, if the community could afford it, to re-honour the dead at the next *gawai antu* which enabled the status of the deceased to be elevated to a higher grade (1963: 324). In this respect the *gawai antu* can be seen as the post-mortem culmination of a life-long series of congratulatory festivals celebrating personal achievements and proclaiming the prestige and social status that accompanies such successes. That is to say, one finds that while on the one hand individuals may themselves sponsor a number of prestigious *gawai* during their lifetime according to their success in various fields of endeavour, this sequence is continued on the other hand, after their deaths when they are commemorated by surviving *bilek* members or their successors.

As far as our present interests are concerned, the important point to note here is that while the early stages in this sequence of mortuary rites - namely the performance of the *sabak* dirge; interment of the body and the provision of burial goods; and the rites of *serara'*-follow immediately, or very shortly after, a person's death, the celebration of a *gawai antu* may not take place until several years later. In this respect it is evident that while most people will almost certainly possess close kin to carry out the initial stages in this sequence on their behalf - even if only so as to protect themselves from the inauspicious consequences of their proximity to death - it is by no means definite, indeed it is highly unlikely, that an individual will be commemorated at a later date if their *bilek* family has 'died out' by the time the next

gawai antu is held. In this light it is apparent then, as Uchibori has himself observed, that

"The existence of the succeeding generation in the *bilek* family alleviates not only their understandable worry about their difficult later years, but also their anxiety about a more distant future. As one informant put it, "If we have no inheritor of the family, that is 'barren' (*punas*); we cannot be commemorated after our death" (n.d.: 6).

This common Iban interest in the continuity of the *bilek* family sheds light on an otherwise curious detail concerning the construction of *garong* baskets at *gawai antu*. As I mentioned earlier *garong* baskets are woven in memory of all those who have died in the interval between two successive *gawai antu*. There are, however, two exceptions: children and those who have died young without issue (Sandin 1961: 177, 1963: 323; Uchibori n.d.: 16-17). Children are instead commemorated with wicker models of fruit trees (Sandin 1961: 177; Uchibori n.d.: 18), while those who have died young without heirs have shorter and smaller baskets made for them known as *gelayan* (Sandin 1961: 177; 1963: 323; Uchibori n.d.: 17). Uchibori suggests that the reason children do not have *garong* baskets made for them is "presumably because children do not drink rice wine" (n.d.: 16)⁷, but he can offer no explanation as to why those who have died without offspring should also be excluded from this ritual honour. In my opinion, however, the reasons for *both* these exceptions to the custom of commemorating the dead with *garong* baskets are perfectly clear and can be directly related to an underlying theme of social continuity. By this I mean that in both instances we are concerned with

categories of persons who have failed to reproduce themselves, be it on account of their youth or for some other reason. Such individuals are usually young enough to have relatives in the same or ascending generation who will commemorate them at a *gawai antu*; nevertheless, they are still emphatically distinguished from those who have conformed to the Iban ideal and have left behind successors to continue their respective *bilek* families.

In summary then, it is evidently vital for the Iban that there be successors to the *bilek*, for this is the only way of ensuring that the dead will be properly buried with adequate provisions for the next world, and, subsequently, be remembered and honoured in their commemoration at a *gawai antu*. This situation arises out of the very nature of the *bilek* family as an autonomous and self-perpetuating social unit. One finds, however, that the theme of family continuity is also clearly discernible in the Iban conceptualization of *ayu* and *bungai* in the form of plants. Accordingly, one can argue that, in this instance, the organic imagery of these terms should be seen not simply as a metaphor for the unity and integrity of the *bilek* family vis à vis the rest of society, but also as a reflection of the social and ritual obligations of surviving *bilek* members in respect of their dead predecessors,

To elaborate, I mentioned earlier that the Baleh Iban describe the collective *ayu* of a *bilek*-family as growing together like a clump of bamboo, while in the Layar Skrang region, the *bungai* of individual family members are said to be gathered together as are the leaves or branches of a single plant. At the time I argued that this imagery reflected the unity and solidarity of the *bilek* family, which in this context was given a 'natural' or 'organic' basis. I would like to suggest here, however,

that this vegetable imagery can be understood not only as a metaphor for the unity of the *bilek* family, but also as a representation of the family as a trans-temporal entity. That is to say, if the *bilek* family is perceived as being in some way like a plant, then it is a plant that persists through time, sending out new shoots and leaves as old ones wither away and die.

This theme is expressed in a number of ways. For example, one finds that the children of a family are frequently referred to as 'sprouts' or 'shoots' (*suli*) (Richards 1981: 354). Conversely, the term *lucok* - which describes a plant that is "withered or dead at the top" (Richards 1981: 196) - may also be used in reference to a *bilek* family that has ceased to exist (i.e., one that has been left with no heirs and successors) (Richards 1981: 196). Similarly, still-born children are referred to as miscarried 'fruit' (*buah lulus*) (Richards 1981: 197), while the principal aim of the rites of *serara* is, as we have seen, to cut away the withered (*layu*) *ayu* or *bungai* of the dead, thus leaving the main stem of the family - the *pun bungai* (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 307) - healthy and intact to give rise to new shoots in subsequent generations. In other words, one finds that the continuance of the *bilek* family in time is often compared with a process of vegetative growth and regeneration⁸, and the suggestion here is that it is this sense of organic continuity which underwrites the ritual responsibilities of living members of the *bilek* family as regards the proper burial and commemoration of their deceased predecessors.

But if the collective representation of family continuity in terms of an organic development can be interpreted as a reflection of certain social and ritual obligations as regards the disposal of the dead, it can,

at the same time, be seen as also legitimizing the claims of surviving *bilek* members in respect of the ownership of the *bilek* apartment and its estate. In other words, the idea of an 'organic' link between successive owners of the *bilek* - expressed through the imagery of vegetative growth and regeneration - can be understood as a means of validating the transfer of *bilek* ownership from one generation to the next.

This latter theme is particularly emphasized in the importance that is attached to the position of *pun bilek* (see also p. 85). Freeman writes that "although the *bilek-family* is a corporate group, it is still recognized that there is a person from whom the ownership and inheritance rights of all the other members of the family ultimately stem, irrespective of whether these members be natal, adoptive or affinal" (1970: 31). This individual is not necessarily the leader of the *bilek-family* (*tuai bilek*), but instead is the senior most person in as far as providing a link with previous owners of the *bilek* is concerned. For example, he or she may be a child of the *bilek*; they may have been adopted in the absence of children; or they may have married into the family but subsequently lost their spouse through death. But whatever the circumstances, the *pun bilek* is always that person through whom the ownership of the *bilek* is acquired, and from whom the current members of the family derive their rights of inheritance.

The special significance of the *pun bilek* can be readily appreciated in the light of the importance that is attached to *bilek* membership in Iban social ideology. What is of particular interest to us here, however, is the use of the term *pun* in the title that is bestowed upon such persons. That is to say that while *pun* may, on the one hand, be understood to describe the origin, foundation, or basis of something

(Richards 1981: 290) - in this instance, the *bilek*-family - this idea of a beginning is at the same time imbued with a distinctly organic flavour. As we have seen (pp. 194-195), Freeman relates the term to an idea of 'growth', translating *pun* as "*a fons et origo*, or stem, as of a tree from which the development of any kind of activity springs" (1981: 31). The suggestion here, then, is that in the present context the *pun bilek* may be thought of as, or likened to, the main stem of a plant, emerging from the 'roots' of previous generations of *bilek* owners and providing a direct link between current occupiers of the *bilek* and their predecessors. As we have seen, other members of the *bilek*-family may be related to the *pun bilek* either as lateral shoots, in the case of children, or as grafts, as in the case of adoptive or affinal members (c.f. the rite of *nusop ayu*), so that the overall picture is one of organic unity or coherence, but it is the *pun bilek* from whom these sets of relationships proceed, and who is ultimately responsible for creating a sense of continuity with the past.

This argument is supported by Uchibori who tells us that "usually it is supposed that the eldest member of the *bilek*-family [i.e. the *pun bilek*] has his (her) allocated part of the *bungai* in its lowest part, while the parts of the younger members are located in successively higher sections" (1978: 23). As Uchibori himself remarks: "this allocation of parts is quite consistent with the growing process of actual plants" (1978: 23).

The social implications of this imagery can of course be directly related to the Iban preoccupation with the *bilek*-family as the principal source of economic, jural and ritual rights and obligations. That is to say, one can argue that it is this combination of organic unity and

continuity which ultimately validates or sanctions Iban principles of *bilek* ownership and inheritance. In other words, the suggestion here is that the portrayal of *bilek* succession through the imagery of plant growth and regeneration can be interpreted as providing a 'natural' basis for what is in other respects a purely social, or jural, process. Thus one finds that while the key principle underlying *bilek* membership is one of residence, at a representational level the *bilek*-family is in fact depicted as a 'descent' group of sorts. In this instance, however, individual rights of group membership, inheritance and so forth, are actualized and sanctioned, not in terms of a blood line, as in the traditional conception of a lineage or clan, but rather as a vegetative development.

One further point should be raised in connection with Iban notions of inheritance and *bilek* continuity, and this is the idea of the *bilek* estate as a material embodiment of a collective family identity. We saw earlier how the acquisition of valuable or ritually important property can provide a major source of personal prestige and status *despite* the fact that the *bilek* property is jointly and equally held by all members of the family. This is because although an individual may relinquish all sense of personal possession in adding newly acquired items to the family 'treasury', the actual fact of acquisition in itself brings its own rewards in terms of the acclaim that it brings to the persons concerned. This personal prestige is formally proclaimed during an individual's lifetime through the sponsorship of celebratory festivals ranked according to degree of success, and may then be subsequently reasserted, after their death, when they are commemorated by their *bilek* successors

at a *gawai antu*. Thus Sandin tells us that it was for these reasons that "Dayaks in past generations tried by all manner of means to work very hard, so that they could afford to buy old jars and to be honoured in the *gawai tajau* [jar festival] and *gawai antu*" (1963: 324).

The issue that I would like to consider here is the relationship between the acquisition of *bilek* property and the institution of commemoration. That is to say that while on the one hand, Sandin's reference to "old jars" and the jar festival (*gawai tajau*) can be seen simply as a reflection of the enormous Iban admiration for antique Chinese storage vessels and the great prestige that is attached to their acquisition, on the other hand, these remarks simultaneously demonstrate the way in which an individual's reputation may survive his or her physical demise to be recalled and applauded at a *gawai antu*, held often several years after their death. Briefly, the suggestion here is that while the acquisition of antique jars and other prestigious items of *bilek* property may bring its own immediate rewards in terms of personal prestige and renown, at the same time there is also an underlying notion that such achievements are being recorded for posterity and that they will act as a material reminder or memorial - albeit an increasingly anonymous one - to an individual's existence following their death. Thus one can argue that while the acquisition of *bilek* property, inheritance, and the institution of commemoration evidently go hand in hand, the *bilek* estate has in fact a further significance in that in certain lights it can also be regarded as a material testimony to the collective achievements of the *bilek*-family from its earliest beginnings to the present day.

This suggestion is supported by the existence of strong sanctions against the disposal of *bilek* property - particularly ritual items - and

in the fervent desire of the Iban to see the *bilek* estate passed on intact to the next generation. This latter concern is clearly reflected in the words of one of Uchibori's informants who told him that it is a tragedy if one is not commemorated, for "one's property would be scattered among a horde of remoter kin who might claim their share" (n.d. 6). In other words, to remain uncommemorated implies that the individual concerned lacks successors to his or her *bilek*, while the dispersal of the *bilek* estate means that, not only is the *bilek* line terminated, but also that all record of it having existed ever, is lost. As Uchibori himself observes: "if an individual's *bilek* is continued and he is commemorated by a recognized inheritor, his property remains intact in its totality" (n.d.:6). He adds that

"The underlying ideology is then that an individual's personal integrity after death can be ensured by commemoration, which maintains his household (*bilek*) and property as he leaves them in this world; thus he still continues to be something in the world he has left. The continuation of the *bilek*-family and property is the worldly extension of his life and existence, the symbol in this world of his, as it were, 'immortal' social personality" (n.d.: 6-7).

This idea of a collective *bilek* identity, or "'immortal' social personality", embodied in the material wealth and prestige of the family's estate, raises a very interesting issue - namely the possible significance of *bilek* property vis à vis the family's standing within the longhouse community. On the one hand we have the much vaunted Iban idea of social equality and egalitarianism, while on the other, we have a system of social evaluation that is based on the accumulation of wealth in one form or another. The implication here is that those families who, in the

course of their *bilek* history, have attained a certain degree of 'affluence' through the acquisition of material wealth and the possession of various objects or artefacts that are of prestigious or ritual value, will inevitably be ranked above those families who have been less fortunate³. This situation is evidently in complete contradiction to the egalitarian ethos of Iban social ideology so emphatically advanced by Freeman (1981: *passim*), and it would be interesting to examine how the issue is resolved among the Iban themselves. Regrettably, it is impossible to pursue this line of inquiry any further at present owing to insufficient data. For the moment, therefore, we must be content simply to note that the significance of the *bilek* estate as a reflection of a family's social worth may in fact extend somewhat further than has previously been supposed.

Summary and conclusion

I began this chapter by referring to Uchibori's account of the longhouse community being likened to a tree (*sekayau*), that is to say an organic whole wherein the health and well-being of its individual parts is related to the state of growth of the entire organism. But if Iban society at longhouse level can be described in this way - i.e, in terms of plant and arboreal images - so too can the *bilek*-families that go to make up that community, whose individual existence is similarly portrayed in terms of floral and botanical metaphors. The imagery employed in these two contexts is not entirely identical; nevertheless I have argued here that they may both be interpreted in much the same way. That is to say, the collective representations of the longhouse community as a tree,

and the *bilek*-family as a plant, can, in both instances be read as a metaphorical assertion of the unity and integrity of Iban society. The difference between the two modes of representation is largely one of scale or reference, the choice of images depending on whether we are dealing with the longhouse community as a whole, or with the particular circumstances relating to individual families within that wider society.

In as far as the latter are concerned, I have argued that the portrayal of the collective *ayu*, or *bungai*, of individual *bilek* members - as growing together in clusters, or as shoots from a single stem, can be interpreted as a reflection of Iban attitudes towards the autonomy and integrity of the family unit. That is to say, the representation of individual family members as the leaves or branches of a single plant or plant cluster imbues the *bilek*-family with an organic unity that makes no distinction as to whether their membership is by birth or recruitment, while at the same time it defines the *bilek* household as a discrete and self-sufficient unit within the wider organization of the longhouse community. These themes are particularly evident in the notion that the health and well being of individual family members is ultimately linked to the fate of the *bilek*-family as a whole - c.f., the rites of *serara*' that free surviving family members from the contagious 'blight' of death. In short, the portrayal of family life through the imagery of plant and botanical metaphors can be understood as bestowing an organic 'imperative' upon the social organization of the longhouse community into *bilek*-families. And much the same can be said of the representation of the longhouse community, as a whole, in terms of arboreal images, the principal differences being those of scale and context.

But while the themes of social unity and integrity are evidently key tenets of Iban social ideology, one finds that this floral and botanical imagery can also be linked to a further set of ideas that centres around a notion of social continuity. This latter concern is particularly pertinent in relation to the *bilek*-family and can be divided into three distinct, though overlapping, areas of interest. First, there is the dependency of senior generations upon younger members of the *bilek*-family to support them in their old age and infirmity, and, following their death, to perform the elaborate series of mortuary rites that will ensure their future happiness in Sebayon, the Iban after-world. Then there is the need of *bilek* successors to establish some kind of link, or continuity, with previous owners of the apartment and its property, in order to legitimize or validate their claim to the *bilek* estate. Thirdly, there is the desire to see the *bilek* estate - which in certain lights may be said to embody the collective social identity of the *bilek*-family - inherited and maintained intact by future generations of *bilek* owners, thus preserving some kind of material record or memorial - albeit an anonymous one - of an individual's achievements. These concerns, I have argued, turn upon the idea of the continuity of the *bilek*-family over successive generations and they are expressed through the imagery of vegetative growth and regeneration whereby the lives of individual family members are depicted as the development of leaves or shoots from a main family stem or stool (*pun*). In other words, there is an idea of an organic link, not only between current members of the *bilek*, but also between successive generations of owners, which both legitimizes inheritance and ownership, and at the same time reflects the

social and ritual obligations of *bilek* successors in respect of those that have preceded them.

In conclusion then, one can argue that the Iban appropriation of floral and botanical imagery as a source of metaphorical representations describing the ordering of society, resembles, in many respects, the Aristotelian view of the state as an organism. Russell describes the latter position thus:

"The State, though later in time than the family, is prior to it, and even to the individual, by nature: for 'what each thing is when fully developed we call its nature' [Aristotle], and human society, fully developed, is a State, and the whole is prior to the part. The conception involved here is that of *organism*: a hand, when the body is destroyed, is, we are told, no longer a hand. The implication is that a hand is to be defined by its purpose - that of grasping - which it can only perform when joined to a living body. In a like manner, an individual cannot fulfill his purpose unless he is part of a State" (1982: 197; emphasis in text).

In the case of the Iban material the implications are much the same. That is to say, at a representational level the *bilek*-family, and more generally, the longhouse community, are metaphorically endowed with an organic character so that the complex web of social relationships that go to make up Iban society are portrayed as a 'natural' condition of mankind. Such ideas beg the question of indigenous notions of nature, especially when one comes to consider the idea of a 'natural' association between things, or whether the world of plants and so forth is regarded as belonging to a realm that is distinguishable and 'opposed' in some way to the world of man as found in our own discrimination between nature and culture. Regrettably, such profound issues cannot be discussed properly

without a great deal of further research, and so for the moment we must leave our investigation as it stands. For the time being then, one should simply note the various ways in which the Iban have appropriated the circumstances of plant life and the processes of vegetative growth and development as source of images for the collective representation of dominant social concerns and values.

NOTES - Chapter V

1. Uchibori mentions that these categories are also related to geographical and cosmological orientations, although he does not elaborate upon their significance in these contexts. In the upper Skrang, for example, the longhouse is aligned according to the movement of the sun so that the *pun* end of the building is in the west and the *ujong* end in the east, while in other areas it is oriented according to the flow of the river on whose banks it stands so that the *pun* end is upstream and the *ujong* end down (Uchibori 1978: 63, n.9).
2. The Iban dead are said to come in a great party to the longhouse of the living in order to escort the *semengat* of the recently deceased to the land of the dead (Sebayan). This creates a potentially dangerous situation for it is felt that the dead may also entice the *semengat* of the living to accompany them upon their return to Sebayan, and precautions are therefore taken to ensure that the dead do not actually enter the longhouse as such (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 292; Jensen 1974: 93; Uchibori 1978: 52). At the same time, Manang Jaban (one of the celestial *manang* or shamans) is asked to provide a special petrified gourd (*pencelap batu janggalat*) which may be used to 'cool' the longhouse (*celap rumah*) after it has been 'scorched' (*angat*) by the visitation of the dead (Sandin 1966: 35).
3. Curiously, Jensen tells us that *manang* "have no role in mortuary rites" (1974: 149).
4. In this instance, Richards uses the word *bungai* rather than *ayu*, although he makes no reference to any mystical interpretation of this term in his dictionary entry for *bungai* (1981: 55).
5. For example, if the *bilek*-family has no children of its own, they will adopt the children of others. Freeman reports that out of a sample of 53 extra-*bilek* adoptions in 3 longhouses, 70% of these were made by persons having no children of their own (1970: 19). He writes:

"This percentage demonstrates clearly the principal motive prompting adoption. Adoption enables childless couples to escape from their predicament. The children which they adopt and rear can be relied upon to care for their adoptive parents in their old age. In Iban society, based as it is on a subsistence economy, the aged have no one to look to but their own or their adopted children, and their grandchildren, within the *bilek-family*" (Freeman 1970: 19).

6. c.f. the importance of burial property as an eschatological concept is reflected in the Iban name for the after-world (Sebayan), for it can be translated as (The Place of) 'Those With Grave Goods' (*Se-baya-an*) (Richards 1981: 327)

7. It will be recalled that *garang* baskets hold the bamboo vessels filled with rice wine that is dedicated to the memory of those that have died (see p. 210).

8. c.f. the words of the prayer accompanying marriage ceremonies which asks that the couple concerned may
 "... be fruitful like the banana which is planted out,
 like the sugar cane stuck in the ground"
 (Ling Roth I, 1896: 113)
 One should also note in this connection that at *gawai antu* festivals, those who have died young, while still children, do not have *garang* baskets made for them, but instead are provided with model fruit trees (see p. 186), while among the Balau Iban, dead children are not buried, but rather they are placed in jars and suspended from fruit trees (Perham 1884: 292; Gomes 1911: 143). The significance of this association between young children and fruit trees in the context of Iban mortuary practices is not entirely clear; nevertheless it is still interesting to again find that some kind of parallel or equation is drawn between the development of human life and vegetative fecundity.

9. One should note that a family's heirlooms and treasures, which include storage jars, brassware and so forth, are always on permanent display within the *bilek* apartment, while their collection of head trophies are hung in the gallery (*ruai*) outside each *bilek* door. Furthermore, on festive occasions each family adorns their respective sections of the longhouse verandah (*tanju*) with their best textiles and fabrics in honour of the gods and for their admiration by their neighbours.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF RICE

Introduction

In examining the social implications of the vegetable imagery that surrounds the Iban conception of *ayu* and *bungai* one finds that two distinct principles are revealed: namely a concern for family solidarity - expressed in terms of the organic unity of vegetable matter; and a similar interest in family continuity - expressed through the imagery of vegetable growth and regeneration. In my last chapter I argued that these allied notions can be related to the autonomous and self-sufficient nature of the *bilek*-family as a social institution. In the present chapter, it is my intention to pursue these themes further, and to show how they are simultaneously manifest in other areas of Iban social and religious life. Our interest on this occasion again lies with the appropriation of plant images in the collective representation of key cultural concerns and anxieties. In this instance, however, we are dealing, not with mystical entities as in the case of *ayu* and *bungai*, rather our attention rests upon a very real and important feature of the Iban world - namely rice. In the

course of my discussion I shall demonstrate how the ritual significance of rice cultivation can be seen as providing the Iban with another set of categories through which the themes of family integrity and continuity may again be expressed. Furthermore, I shall argue that the economic importance of rice - both as the staple food stuff in the Iban diet, and as a source of wealth and material prosperity - means that rice farming not only provides the Iban with a source of images for the expression of important social attitudes and values, but at the same time is the medium through which many of these concerns are realized and resolved in the economic and political ordering of society.

The economic importance of rice and its social implications

In a subsistence economy that is almost entirely focused upon agriculture, rice has for countless generations "meant the difference between eating and going hungry, between health and sickness, prosperity and deprivation, even life and death" (Jensen 1974: 152). One finds, therefore, that the cultivation of rice occupies a very special place in Iban social ideology. Thus, Sather writes of the "highly competitive" nature of Iban rice farming and the fundamentally important social values that are attached to it (1980a: 70). No one can hope to gain social esteem without first succeeding as a rice farmer and those who fail must turn to others for loans or gifts (Sather 1980a: 70). In this respect then, agricultural success is regarded by the Iban as an essential qualification for those who aspire to positions of influence within the community (Jensen 1974: 60).

Some idea of the strength of feeling that is involved here is revealed in the attitudes of the Saribas Iban who, as we saw earlier (p. 78-79), have largely abandoned rice farming in favour of more lucrative cash crops such as rubber and pepper. Sather tells us that even in this instance "[r]ice farming remains a primary focus of social values" (1980a: 69-70), and he adds that

"Those who are successful farmers receive special honour and are sought out to pronounce blessings on ceremonial occasions, so that their good fortune may extend to others. For Iban who continue to live in the countryside, success in growing rice is still a crucial first step in gaining status and social prominence. Families with surplus rice are in a position to be generous, while those who are indebted, and unable to supply their own needs, can never hope to achieve social ascendancy. Thus the basic values that have traditionally invested rice agriculture remain largely intact" (1980a: 70)'.

It is evident then, that the cultivation of rice is often taken by the Iban as a kind of yardstick, or frame of reference, for the evaluation of a *bilek*-family's social worth as based on a competitive comparison of harvest yields. At the same time, though, agricultural success involves far more than simply the issues of oneupmanship, for a good harvest is directly related to a number of more tangible rewards or benefits. By this I mean that a surplus supply of rice, not only frees a family from the ignominy of having to borrow grain², it also provides its members with a source of capital which can then be invested in a number of different ways.

For example, the excess yield from a plentiful harvest may be used to purchase valuable antique storage jars, plates, gongs, cannon, and other ceramic and brass artefacts by which the Iban set so much store. These will then be put on display in the *bilek* apartment - together with existing family treasures and heirlooms - to be admired and envied by one and all. Alternatively, and perhaps more importantly, this capital provides the family with the economic wherewithal to sponsor a prestigious festival or *gawai*, celebrating the various deeds and accomplishments of its members, thereby enhancing their status as individuals while at the same time adding to the prestige and influence of the family generally within the longhouse community.

Against this background, then, one finds that the *bilek*-family - as the unit of agricultural labour - again assumes a position of paramount importance in Iban society. By this I mean that the individual who aspires to a place of influence within the longhouse community must rely heavily upon the agricultural labours of his or her fellow *bilek* members, in order to amass sufficient economic resources to be able to sponsor some form of festival. In this respect, an emphasis is again placed on the corporate and co-operative nature of the *bilek*-family, for it is upon the combined support of other family members that the success of any individual must ultimately rest.

Before proceeding any further it is important to realize that the situation described above is in many respects an idealization of the realities of Iban rice farming. That is to say, the idea that the Iban can always rely upon the cultivation of rice to supply them with food and satisfy their material needs is not entirely accurate, for it frequently

happens that a family's harvest is insufficient to meet its annual demand for grain. For example, Freeman's field data show that in the community where he studied only one third of *bilek*-families were able to secure their annual requirement (1970: 265-66). This was largely due to particularly bad weather during the farming season 1949-50 when heavy rain during August and September 1949 seriously interfered with the firing of the farms. Nonetheless, Freeman still has cause to remark that "it seems probable that even in normal years it is not uncommon for a minor percentage of households to fall below the ordinary level of subsistence" (1970: 266). In doing so he mentions that the Iban expectation, given normal weather conditions and so forth, is that "from 70 per cent to 80 per cent of *bilek*-families would attain their ordinary requirements, and that in favourable seasons virtually all would be successful" (Freeman 1970: 266). He adds, however, that

"sufficient evidence is available for us to reach the broad conclusion that the subsistence economy of the Iban is one of scarcity rather than plenty. There are probably few, if any, Iban families which have not, at some time or other, found themselves in straitened circumstances with insufficient *padi* for their barest needs" (Freeman 1970: 266)².

It is apparent then, that although the Iban economy is principally geared towards the cultivation of hill rice, it frequently happens that the Iban must supplement their diet with other sources of food (most commonly sago - either wild or domesticated).

To summarize briefly, the cultivation of rice traditionally is central to the Iban way of life. For centuries it has provided them with their staple diet and, in times of surplus, constituted a major form of economic capital or wealth. The latter may be translated, on the one hand, into all kinds of material advantages or benefits, including the acquisition of highly prized items of family property such as antique storage jars or brass cannon and gongs. Alternatively, rice surpluses may be directed towards a more overtly political goal in the pursuit of status and influence through the sponsorship of prestigious festivals (*gawai*) that either celebrate personal successes - for example, on the field of battle - or else are seen as contributing to the spiritual welfare of the longhouse community. Whatever its uses, rice, and the activities associated with its cultivation, are a key focal point in Iban society and culture and in this respect it is perhaps not surprising, perhaps, to find that the Iban see rice as being imbued with mystical properties and that a special significance is attached to the relative success, or failure, of a *bilek*-family's agricultural endeavours. It is these latter aspects of Iban rice farming that shall principally concern us in this present chapter, and accordingly it is to what might be called the 'religious significance of rice' that I should now like to turn.

The religious significance of Iban rice farming

The importance of rice for the Iban, in economic terms alone, is, as we have just seen, considerable. It is, however, the ritual, or 'religious' significance, that is attached to the cultivation of rice which ultimately places this activity at the very heart of Iban culture.

The Iban frequently say of themselves: "Our *adat* is hill rice cultivation' (*adat kami bumai*) (Jensen 1974: 152), and indeed their distinctive methods of farming and associated ritual practices must be seen as definitive characteristics of Iban culture. As Jensen observes, the agricultural procedure that they have adopted "sets the Iban apart from other tribes and races who do not farm hill rice according to the same conventions and beliefs" (1974: 151). More importantly, however, rice farming embodies a number of key 'religious' precepts which are fundamental to the Iban way of life, and in this respect rice is imbued with a sanctity which makes almost anything to do with its cultivation, or use in ritual contexts, of the utmost significance for the Iban.

To begin with, rice farming, for the Iban, is as much a ritual concern as it is one of agricultural technique. As Freeman remarks: "To the Iban ... the cultivation of *padi* is not so much a problem in agricultural method, as a problem in ritual knowledge and skill" (1970: 50). This means that the Iban must follow a special set of ritual procedures and observances if their rice crop is to flourish. This includes making the right supplications to the gods in order to secure their assistance in procuring a bountiful harvest. For example, before the rice fields can be cleared, Pulang Gana - the paramount god of Iban agriculture and owner of the soil (see p. 110-111) - must first be compensated for the use of the land during the coming year (Jensen 1974: 42; Sather 1980b: xix). It is felt that were this precaution not taken, then Pulang Gana would be piqued by this disrespect and frustrate the attempts of those who subsequently tried to grow their rice on the site. On the other side of the coin, one finds that the gods are said actually to participate in the task of cultivation, although this divine assistance

remains unseen, taking place as it does in the supernatural realm. Thus Sather observes that the individual who leads the proceedings in agricultural rites is thought of as the "earthly vehicle" of the gods, while his or her activities in this respect are "regarded as the outward, tangible form of an action performed by the gods themselves on an unseen spiritual plane" (1977a: 162). Sather adds that "The notion that the performer is a vehicle of the gods rests upon the further conviction that [their] actions are in accordance with a precedent established by the gods themselves, followed by their Iban descendants in the past, and transmitted relatively unaltered, generation by generation, down to the present day" (1977a: 162). In this context, the proper observance of agricultural rites "reaffirms a kinship with the gods and continuing confidence in their life-sustaining powers" (Sather 1977a: 163).

This set of ideas is of course derived from Iban mythology, and in particular those stories which tell of how the Iban first learnt of the correct social and ritual codes of behaviour as embodied in the Iban *adat* or customary law (see p. 112-113). The *adat*, it will be recalled, was introduced to the Iban via Surong Gunting, half man and half god, who was himself taught by his grandfather Lang Sengalang Burong. Against this mythological background agricultural success may therefore be seen as both confirming the Iban myth of ethnogenesis and at the same time reaffirming the validity of the Iban way of life⁴. Furthermore, a good harvest testifies to the favour of the gods and as in other areas of Iban life those who secure the beneficent attentions of the gods are looked upon with admiration and respect. In this respect, the family who regularly reaps a plentiful supply of rice wins a certain status within the longhouse community, for this happy state of affairs is seen as a

reflection of the family's social worth as the keepers of tradition and upholders of the Iban way of life.

By way of summary then, one can argue that the Iban attitude towards rice and agriculture is, in some aspects, not unlike our own attitude towards money and material profit within the framework of the Protestant ethic. By this I mean that in either context, those who are successful and well-off - be they businessmen or rice-farmers - are thought to be so because they have conducted their lives and affairs in the proper manner and are thus able to 'reap their just reward' (quite literally in the Iban case). In this respect, the ritual character of Iban rice farming, together with the significance of this activity in terms of Iban religious beliefs, can be seen as endorsing the political advantages - vis à vis the acquisition of social status and influence - that stem from the purely economic importance of rice. In other words, the positive evaluation of agricultural success in Iban religious ideology serves to sanction the ascendancy of those who are '*raja brani*' (lit. 'rich and brave'; see p. 94) to positions of authority within the longhouse community.

Rice and semangat padi

The idea that Pulang Gana and other deities may themselves participate in the annual events of the agricultural cycle is, however, but one aspect of the 'religious' attitude that the Iban adopt with respect to the cultivation of rice. By this I mean that rice itself - both the plant and grain - is also imbued with supernatural attributes or qualities that go beyond its purely nutritional or economic worth. This is clearly

evident in the Iban idea of a 'rice soul' (*semengat padi*), and in their perception of a mystical association between rice and man whereby the two are drawn together in a relationship of mutual sustenance and well-being.

To elaborate, the Iban say that rice, like everything else in the world, has a mystical counterpart in the form of *semengat*. Thus Freeman writes that "It is the fervent conviction of the Iban that their *padi* is a spirit, that it possesses a soul, a personality of its own, and it is this belief that permeates the whole of their agricultural practice" (1970: 153). I have already mentioned how the health and vitality of living organisms is regarded as being directly attributable to the state or condition of their *semengat* and rice is no exception to this understanding. Thus Sather informs us that "[j]ust as with human beings, the vitality and natural increase of rice are thought to depend upon the inner state of its soul, fecundity and vigor are the outward manifestations of a healthy soul; death and decay, of one that is lost or ailing" (1980a: 94). In this respect one therefore finds that much of Iban agricultural ritual is aimed at securing the health and fertility of the *semengat padi*, and ensuring that they do not stray from the family's rice fields.

In most respects, the Iban conception of *semengat padi* is perfectly consistent with more general notions about the nature of *semengat*. There is, however, one particular aspect of *semengat padi* beliefs which differs markedly from other representations of *semengat*. Whereas in every other instance the character or form of *semengat* is directly correlated to that of the object or entity to which it belongs, the *semengat* of rice is exceptional in that it is conceived in an anthropomorphic light. For example, Howell tells us that at festival inaugurating the planting season (*nyinklan benih*), the officiating bard (*lemembang*) "personifies" the rice

seed and sings their praises (1977: 105). Similarly, Jensen reports that the *semengat padi* is said by the Iban to be "just like one of us" (*baka kitai tu semengat padi*) (1974: 153), while Freeman writes that "the *padi* spirits are looked upon as possessing a society of their own, and the Iban behave towards them, and address them just as though they were real persons" (1970: 155).

This anthropomorphic conception of the *semengat padi* is exemplified in the words of a prayer (*sampi*) recited at the end of the harvest summoning their return to the longhouse for the duration of the interval between farming seasons:

" Come gather, come muster,
Come throng and come cluster.
Let those who are blind be led by the hand,
And let all be carried, who are crippled or lame.
All boys, all girls,
All fathers, all mothers,
All grandsires, all grandams,
All kith and kin of family and of tribe!
Wherever you are: be your fishing with rod, or with net, or with
poisoned root;
Be you hunting or setting your traps.
Come back! Come back!
To sleeping-place, to dwelling-place,
To fireside, and to mat;
To the bark-bin, your nest, your haven, your home."
(Freeman 1970: 214n)

Similarly, the personification of the *semengat padi* is also revealed in the actual welcome that is provided for them upon their arrival back at the longhouse. For example, Freeman tells us that "when the *padi* spirits have been conducted back to the long-house - a trail of puffed rice (*rendai*) is

scattered for them to tread - they are welcomed with ceremony such as the Iban reserve for their most distinguished guests" (1970: 156).

The honour that is accorded at harvest time is, however, no more than a particular instance of a more general reverence for rice, for the Iban are adamant that rice must always be treated with the utmost respect (Freeman 1970: 155, 212, 217; Jensen 1974: 153 seq.; Sather 1977a: 157-158). The underlying reasons for this circumspect attitude is because disrespect - whether it be towards rice or another human being - is said to disturb and disorient the victim's *semangat* and hence their physical health and well-being (Sather 1977a: 157). Accordingly one finds that rice is always approached in a most deferential manner for the *semangat padi*, we are told, "has almost human responses and is consistently sensitive to human behaviour" (Jensen 1974: 153). For example, the *semangat padi* are said to 'need company' and to 'like attention' (Jensen 1974: 153), and should they feel 'unhappy' or 'unwanted' - either through lack of care or disrespect on the part of the family with whose rice crop they are associated - it is thought that they might very well depart from the rice field and take up residence elsewhere, with predictably disastrous consequences for the success of the harvest. Thus Freeman explains that the reason the Iban only resort to the use of a small hand knife (*ketap*) when harvesting their rice crop is that "in reaping with the *ketap*, the *padi* is taken, as it were, unawares and with a minimum shock or disturbance" (1970: 208). He adds that "it is believed that if more drastic and uncereemonious methods were introduced the *padi* spirit would be likely to flee to other farms, and that as a result, the crop would be a poor one" (1970: 208).

Freeman also tells of how the Baleh Iban refused to allow him to survey their rice fields for much the same reasons: "It was said that once

before a survey party had visited the Baleh, and that in ensuing years, there had been disastrously bad harvests; the *padi* spirits, disturbed by the brusque ways of the surveyors, had taken offence and fled" (1970: 156). Similarly one learns that when rubber as a crop was introduced to the Baleh in the 1920s, it was initially opposed because it was feared that the spirit of the rubber trees (*antu kubal*) would attack and drive away the *semengat padi* of the rice fields (Freeman 1970: 268). In short, one finds that the *semengat padi* are frequently and consistently attributed with human feelings and responses.

The personification of rice involves far more than simply a question of temperament, however, for it also includes the notion of a 'comparable' physiology. Whereas in the Iban conception of a human plant counterpart (*ayu* or *bungai*) it is man's health and physical condition which is described in terms of vegetable images, in the case of rice the reverse is true in that in this instance it is human physiology which provides a vocabulary through which the health and growth of rice may be discussed. For example, the *padi* plant is susceptible to various forms of pestilence and insect infestation, and these afflictions are regularly described by the Iban in terms of human ailments or illnesses (*tabin*). Thus rice is often said to suffer from headaches (*pedra*), colds (*renga*), and even warts (*butir*) (Jensen 1974: 187). Similarly, when the rice plant begins to swell with ripening grain it is said to be 'pregnant like a woman' (*baka orang indu ngandong*) (Banks 1949: 81; Freeman 1970: 196 nl; Jensen 1974: 185; Richards 1981: 137).

This anthropomorphic representation gives rise to a number of ritual prohibitions (*pemali*) designed to avoid causing physical 'injury' to the *semengat padi*. For example, Jensen writes that "It is expressly prohibited

(*mali*) to tread hard (*nukah*), kick (*ngindik*), strike (*maloh*), or break (*matah*) rice on the farm or in the longhouse, except in the actual process of reaping (*ngetau*), treading out the ears (*ngindik*), threshing (*nungkoh*), pounding (*nutok*), and milling (*ngisar*)" (Jensen 1974: 154). Freeman tells us that these prohibitions were frequently cited by the Iban in response to his inquiries as to why they did not adopt the more efficient Chinese method of using flails to thresh their rice crop. He writes that "Their reply was always the same: 'We Iban simply dare not (*enda kempang*) strike our *padi*, for if we did so the *padi* spirits ... would take offence, and, in anger, desert us'" (1970: 212).

To summarize, briefly, the Iban representation of *semangat padi* is very evidently modelled on an image of man and his society as seen from an Iban perspective of life. This anthropomorphic portrayal of rice is apparent at three different levels - the physiological, the temperamental, and the social - each of which establishes a similitude of sorts between mankind and the rice that he cultivates. These metaphorical identifications suggest there is some kind of correspondence between the existence of man and that of rice, and I would like now to show how this assertion, or postulate, is in fact manifested in a series of parallels or inferences that the Iban make between the health and general well-being of a *bilek*-family and the success of its annual rice crop.

The relationship between rice and the fate of the *bilek*-family

At a purely economic or materialistic level, the fact that an adequate harvest is essential to the physical and material well-being of

family members is self-evident. This, however, is not our chief concern here; rather it is what Sather has described as "the intimate identification that exists in Iban belief between *padi* and the family that cultivates it" (1977a: 154). Sather's use of the term 'identification' in this context is, as I indicated in my epistemological introduction, somewhat problematic. Sather himself remarks that "in a sense rice and the activities associated with its cultivation represent an extension of [a] family's spiritual personality" (1977a: 154), which suggests that some kind of ontological link may be involved. Without further evidence, however, it is perhaps more prudent simply to note that the Iban perceive some kind of mystical correlation between their own lives and existence, and that of their rice crop, and that this correspondence is supported by a series of metaphorical assertions that testify to the anthropomorphic character of rice plants and *semangat padi*.

A good idea of the nature of this relationship between a *bilek*-family and its rice crop is revealed, however, in the ideas that underlie the pre-harvest rites of *sumba padi* (*sumba* = n.f. of *nyumba* - to reap prematurely), which revolve around the reaping and consumption of the first rice of the agricultural year. On such occasions, a little rice is reaped on three consecutive days as a prelude to the main harvest (Sather 1977a: 154). This rice is threshed at once in preparation for the ceremonial eating of the 'new rice' (*makai padi baru*) (Sather 1977a: 154). Before this can occur, however, a small amount of the new rice - *padi sumba* - is first placed upon the family's ritual whetstone (*batu umai* or *batu pemanggol*), together with the household's farming implements. This rice is then subsequently disposed of, either by feeding it to the dogs or else to the family's chickens (Sather 1977a: 154).

According to Sather, the object of this rite is to 'neutralize' the ill-effects of bad dreams and omens that may have occurred to a family in the course of the agricultural cycle or that may be attached to the farm implements (Sather 1977a: 154). Similarly Freeman, in his account of this ceremony, describes the dog's share as a "safeguard ... for it is believed that any deleterious influences which may have become associated with the *padi*, because of bad omens and the like, encountered during the period of its cultivation, will thus be visited upon the dogs" (1970: 204). In other words, it seems that for the Iban "signs or portents encountered in connection with farming directly reflect upon [a] family's health and spiritual well-being ...[but that]... [t]hrough the rite of *sumba padi* whatever spiritual danger has accumulated in this way is transferred to the *padi sumba* and thereby removed from the family, absolving its members from danger" (1977a: 154). In short, what we are dealing with here is an idea that the lives and health of family members may be threatened by the same dangers that jeopardize the health of the rice crop growing in the fields. In this respect there would indeed appear to be some notion of a shared identity between man and rice. Regrettably, however, a proper discussion of the precise nature of this identification lies, as I have already indicated, beyond the scope of this present analysis awaiting the findings of future research into Iban metaphysics.

But to continue, a correlation between the lives and health of family members and the fate of their rice crop can also be discerned in the ritual edicts that are observed at the beginning of the farming season. For example, Jensen tells us that when the Iban prepare to commence planting

"They are especially careful with the baskets (*uyut* or *sintong*) containing rice seed. Under no conditions may these be allowed to topple over, and if the string should break it would mean dire misfortune or death to the *bilek*. Rice spilled in this way may not be gathered up (*nadai tau gumpol*), and should it be spilled the only possible solution would be an elaborate *piring* ceremony [expiratory offering] in the hope that the spirits might accept that as propitiation" (1974: 178).

In this instance the Iban can again be seen to draw a direct parallel between their own lives and the fate of the rice that they cultivate. In other words, one finds that a family's interest in rice cultivation, as a primary source of sustenance and material benefits, is at the same time reflected at a representational level in the assumption of a mystical relationship between personal welfare and that of their rice crop.

Padi Pun

For the Iban then, the health, integrity and general well-being of the *bilek*-family is, as we have just seen, closely associated with the state of growth and fertility of its rice crop. This notion is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the Iban concept of "sacred rice" or *padi pun* (Freeman 1970: 50). To elaborate, Freeman tell us that each *bilek*-family has in its possession certain ritually important, or "sacred", strains of rice known as *padi sangking* and *padi pun* (1970: 188), and he writes "These ritual rices, and *padi pun* in particular, are the abode, the sanctum sanctorum of the soul or spirit [ie, *semengat*] of the padi plant" (Freeman 1970: 188). Accordingly one finds that "The sowing of *padi pun* is marked by the foremost rites of the Iban calendar, [for] this sacred

rice is the plinth, as it were, upon which the whole elaborate fertility cult of Iban agriculture is based" (Freeman 1970: 188).

The *padi pun* of a *bilek*-family is typically a variety of rice that possesses some unusual characteristic or peculiar colouration (Freeman 1970: 188), and Freeman tells us that "Very often a family's *padi pun* has its own myth of supernatural origin, and is hedged about by prohibitions (*pemali*) and attitudes of respect and deference" (Freeman 1970: 188). He adds "[n]o other ritual possession ranks more highly, for not only is *padi pun* the abode of the chief *padi* spirits (*antu padi*)⁵; it is also charged with stored up fertility - the fertility acquired during countless magical rites performed by previous generations" (1970: 188). Accordingly one finds that "[t]he *padi pun* is never sold or given away, and each year only part of the seed which a family holds is sown, as a safeguard against the possibility of crop failure through the depredation of animals and insects" (Freeman 1970: 188).

At the beginning of each farming season, a small plot of *padi pun* is sown at the "ritual centre" of a family's rice fields (Freeman 1970: 188-9). This is the same spot as where the rice seed is placed prior to planting and it is known by the Iban as the *panggal benih* or 'seed pillow' (Howell 1977: 115; Sandin 1962: 252; Sather 1977a: 156; 1980a: 72). During the course of the agricultural cycle this small area of *padi pun* is the site at which most of the major farming rituals are performed (Freeman 1970: 188-89; Sather 1977a: 156). These rites are, for the most part, designed to promote the fertility and increase of the rice crop and for this reason Sather describes the *padi pun* as the "main conduit through which the beneficent effects of ritual are thought to flow into the growing *padi*" (1977a: 156). Accordingly the *padi pun* itself becomes a

source of fertility (Freeman 1970: 188; Sather 1977a: 156). Furthermore it is a fertility which has been accumulated over generations of repeated ritual and should thus be carefully protected and conserved. To this end the *panggal benih* is surrounded by magical plants (*sengkenyang*) and charms (*pengaruh*) which are said to protect and enhance the fecundity of this most precious source of fertility (Freeman 1970: 189; Sather 1977a: 156).

The identification of the *padi pun* as the key locus of agricultural fertility is obviously closely related to the idea of 'sacred rice' as the principal abode of the *semangat padi*. As we have seen, the *semangat padi* are themselves regarded as the primary source of vegetative growth and development, without whose co-operation the rice crop would fail miserably, and, as already mentioned, elaborate precautions are taken at harvest time to ensure that the aggregate *semangat* of a family's rice field do not become dispersed or separated from one another. The latter include reaping in a continuous or unbroken path which starts at the periphery of the field and moves towards the centre, the idea here being that the *semangat padi* will follow in the path of the reapers until they are all congregated together in one spot - namely the *panggal benih* where the *padi pun* is sown (Freeman 1970: 189, 213-14; Sather 1980a: 72-74). Once gathered together in this way, the *semangat padi* can then be transported back to the longhouse where they will reside in the interval between farming seasons. In this respect one can argue that the *padi pun* has in fact a twofold significance in that on the one hand, it is regarded as a repository of accumulated fertility, while on the other, it is the container or abode of the *semangat padi*.

At this point I would like to return to our consideration of the Iban perception of a mystical relationship between a *bilek*-family and the rice that it cultivates. First, however, a brief recapitulation on the subject of *padi pun*. As we have seen the *padi pun* may be said to embody or encapsulate the fertility of a family's rice crop in that it is both the "sanctum sanctorum" of the *semangat padi* and itself a natural repository of agricultural fertility acquired through generations of ritual attendances. In this respect, the *padi pun* is, as Freeman observes, the most important ritual possession of any *bilek*-family for their entire livelihood is thought to depend upon the continued fecundity of their particular strain of 'sacred rice'. Accordingly one finds that only some of the *padi pun* is planted each year in order to ensure that a future supply is not jeopardized by the failure of a single season's crop. Similarly, a family's *padi pun* is never sold, or given away, but is passed down from one generation of *bilek* owners to the next, and in this latter respect one can argue that the *padi pun* may be regarded as the centre piece of the *bilek* property or estate. The main point that I wish to put forward here, however, is that the *padi pun* - as the font of agricultural fertility upon which the livelihood and continued well-being of the *bilek*-family depends - is much more than simply an extremely precious ritual item; rather it can be seen as both the material and spiritual embodiment of a collective family identity, an identity acquired in the course of several generations of *bilek* ownership.

To elaborate, the *padi pun* - as the centre piece of *bilek* property - constitutes a direct link between current members of the *bilek* and their predecessors, whose legacy it is. In cases of *bilek* partition, the *padi pun* remains with the senior household, while the junior, emergent *bilek*

takes one of the lesser sacred strains of rice known as *padi sangking*

(Freeman 1970: 50-51). Thus Freeman writes:

"The senior section of a family is always definable by the fact that is *padi pun* was inherited as *padi pun* from the previous generation; while the *padi pun* of a junior section was inherited as *sangking*. By studying the inheritance of *padi pun* and *sangking* therefore, it is always possible to establish the main line of a family, and the various offshoots from it, which have been brought about by partition" (1970: 51).

The idea that emerges here, then, is that while the vegetable imagery attached to the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai* may serve as a representation of family unity and continuity in a mystical plane, the theme of vegetative growth and regeneration is at the same time reiterated in the world of everyday experience through the annual cultivation of the family's *padi pun* by successive generations of *bilek* owners. In this context the significance of the term *pun* becomes apparent, for this 'sacred' strain of rice is like the main 'stem' of the family (*pun bilek*) in that they both can be linked to an underlying theme of *bilek* continuity which in either instance is expressed, or given form, through the imagery of vegetative growth and regeneration.

What is more, given the "intimate identification" that exists between a *bilek* family and its rice crop, one can draw a second parallel between *padi pun* and the vegetable imagery that is attached to the concepts of *ayu* and *bungai*. By this I mean that the *padi pun*, as the sanctum sanctorum of the *semangat padi*, can be regarded as the ultimate source, or repository, of agricultural fertility, and in this respect, one finds that the lives and health of family members can be identified with the flourishing, or

failure, of the *padi pun* in much the same way that they are also correlated with the imagined state of growth of their collective *ayu* or *bungai*. In this context, the *padi pun*, which is re-planted each year at the centre of the family's rice fields, provides a perfect vehicle for portraying the organic nature of the *bilek*-family as discussed in the previous chapter.

Having made this connection, however, I would like to go somewhat further and suggest that the relationship between a *bilek* family and its *padi pun* involves rather more than simply the notion of continuity as encapsulated in the imagery of organic regeneration. In my last chapter, I suggested that the *bilek* property can be regarded as a kind of material record, or testimony, to the collective lives and achievements of family members past and present. I would like to argue here, however, that this notion gains an added significance when seen in conjunction with the Iban attitude towards their *padi pun* which is perhaps the single most important item in this jointly inherited estate. That is to say, the suggestion in this particular instance is that in certain lights, the *padi pun* can in fact be seen as the living embodiment of this collective family identity, its store of latent fertility reflecting the summation of a family's 'vitality' acquired through the lives and endeavours of successive generations of previous *bilek* owners.

To elaborate, I mentioned earlier that the small plot of *padi pun* planted each year acts as a 'ritual centre' for the rice field and that in this capacity it is the site of the majority of agricultural ceremonies that are performed during the course of the farming season. These rites are, for the most part, designed to promote the fertility of the rice crop, and as a result the *padi pun* itself becomes a source of fertility - a

fertility that is added to by each successive season of farming ceremonies. In this context then, one can argue that *padi pun* is imbued with a special significance that goes beyond its purely ritual importance in that not only does it embody the ideal of family continuity, but it also may be understood as actually incorporating something of the past existence of previous *bilek* owners, who, over generations, have carefully tended the *padi pun*, and repeatedly encouraged its fertility by ritual measures performed in the course of countless agricultural seasons. In other words, the accumulated fertility of the *padi pun* is itself a direct consequence of the combined ritual efforts of an entire line of *bilek* predecessors, stretching back to the very first founders of the family. Furthermore, current family members will, in the course of their lifetimes, make their own contribution to this potent store of agricultural fertility, thereby adding something of their own 'personality' to this collective family identity before passing the *padi pun* on to their heirs and successors to the *bilek* estate.

In this light then, *padi pun* can be viewed as something rather more than simply a material legacy. By this I mean that if the *bilek* property can be regarded as a "symbol" of an individual's "immortal" social personality" (Uchibori n.d.: 6-7; see also p 219), then *padi pun* is itself the very 'life and soul' of the *bilek*-family in that its accumulated fertility incorporates something of the lives of all its members, both past and present, as they have striven through their ritual endeavours to add to this store of agricultural fecundity upon which the livelihood of the *bilek* has always rested.

To recapitulate briefly, in the course of this chapter I have sought to show how the Iban regularly and consistently impute a number of parallels between their own existence and that of rice. At the most general level this takes the form of a series of metaphorical assertions that testify to the anthropomorphic nature both of rice plants and the *semengat padi* who give them life and are the source of their fertility. More specifically, however, this general equation of rice and man manifests itself in the idea of a sympathetic relationship between the lives and welfare of *bilek*-family members and the state of growth of their rice crop. This latter notion, I have argued, can in many respects be seen as an actualization of the themes that underlie the Iban conception of *ayu* and *bungai* as discussed in chapters 4 and 5. This is particularly so in the case of the importance that is attached to 'sacred rice', or *padi pun*, which can be understood as embodying the collective identity of the *bilek*-family as a social entity. Together, these ideas have tended to imbue rice, and the activities that are associated with its cultivation, with a 'religious' significance that transcends their purely economic importance, and it is this sentiment which, I have suggested, serves to underwrite or sanctify the social and political implications that arise from inequalities in agricultural production.

There remains, however, one further aspect, or dimension, to this equation between man and rice which I have yet to consider. In this particular instance the emphasis is not so much upon the idea that man and rice are in some way 'alike', or that their lives run in parallel with one another; rather the suggestion here is that the destinies of man and rice are ultimately joined as different aspects or stages in a single

process of development. In this instance the implication is that the correspondence between man and rice is in fact accredited by the Iban with an ontological status whereby man and rice are seen, not merely as being *similar*, but rather as being *essentially* the same. It is to a discussion of this topic, then, that I would now like to turn.

Rice and the ultimate fate of the human *semengat*

In my introduction to the Iban ethnography, I described the Iban afterworld as being an idealized - though inverted - facsimile of the realm of the living. It is reached along the Mandai river - the route being described in the *sabak* death dirge sung after a person's death - and once arrived in the land of the dead, the *semengat* of the deceased settles down to lead a continued existence very similar to that of the living. Surrounded by previously deceased friends and relatives, the dead man or woman finds that everything is much as before except that conditions are generally much more favourable, and 'life' a great deal pleasanter as a result. This happy state of affairs, however, does not last forever; it is of a finite, though unspecified, duration, for as I mentioned earlier, the *semengat* of the ancient dead are said eventually to disintegrate, dissolving into moisture or vapour (see p. 134-136). For the Iban, then, there is no idea of a personal immortality; death does not promise 'life everlasting', only an extended repeat of life as we know it in this world, which is finally terminated by the dissolution of the *semengat*.

What is important about this eventual disintegration of the *semengat*, at least in as far as our present interests are concerned, is the manner in which it occurs - namely a dissolution or vapourization - for

the moisture that results from this event is said to be subsequently precipitated in the world of the living in the form of a mist which then settles on the ground as dew (*ambun*). Uchibori remarks that "the theory of the final dissipation of *semengat* into mist or dew (*ambun*) is one of the most conspicuous features of Iban eschatology" (1978: 259), and he goes on to tell us that

"according to Iban traditions, evaporated *semengat* enter the stalks of grasses called *enterakup* (*Miscanthus* sp.). The stalks of *enterakup* are hollow and contain a red liquid when they are mature. The Iban call the liquid 'the blood of the ghosts' (*darah sebayan*)⁶ and say rather jokingly that this is visible evidence that the *semengat* of the dead have entered these stalks" (1978: 253).

This, however, is not the end of the process for this moisture or 'blood' is then said to be taken up by the rice crop growing in the fields, which it nourishes and sustains (Howell & Bailey 1900: 146-7; Nyuak 1977: 183; Banks 1949: 82; Harriison & Sandin 1966: 193 n.4; Jensen 1974: 108; Uchibori 1978: 253; Sather 1980a: 93-94)⁷. Thus Harriison & Sandin report that

"The *padi* grows only by night - an absolute Iban conviction - and the dew fertilises it. The good grain inside the seed comes direct from the dew. The spirits of the dead are also often said to 'have become dew'" (1966: 193n4)

Similarly, Sather writes that

"The Iban believe that following death, the human soul, after a time in the otherworld, eventually turns to dew (*ambun*) and, as dew, falls to the earth in the early hours of the dawn where it is taken up by the growing rice plants. Dew is thus the final corporal (sic) residue of the soul. It is also the vital substance which, taken into the rice plant, is responsible for its growth" (1980a: 93)

As regards the exact nature of this assimilation of *semengat* by the rice crop, it is not entirely clear if the ancient dead are thought actually to 'become' rice plants, or whether they merely enter into the rice plant as dew (Uchibori 1978: 253). One of Uchibori's informants insisted that the *semengat* of the dead really do become rice plants, but Uchibori himself comments that such an assertion is rarely made and that "usually the process remains vague" (Uchibori 1978: 253).

Nor do these ideas include the notion that an individual's personal identity may be retained in one form or another during the course of this transformation; rather the 'redistribution' of *semengat* in the world of the living is a general one. The Iban, in their prayers, do ask, however, that only the dew of those who, during the course of their lifetime, harvested "rice in plenty, abundant sweet rice", should fall on their fields (Jensen 1974: 189). As Jensen points out, this request evidently "refers to the dew of those who were good and successful in life; having now turned to dew they are expected to confer prosperity" (1974: 189n; see also Nyuak 1977: 183). By the same token, the prayer also asks that the "dew of those who curse, who work evil, be cast away, flung away" (Jensen 1974: 189). This would appear to indicate that there is in fact some correspondence between an individual's existence and the quality of dew produced in the final dissolution of their *semengat*, but apart from this rather general equation, the ancient dead make their 'return' anonymously.

In this last respect there is evidently no idea of a reincarnation as such; nor is there any notion of a re-cycling of human *semengat* across several generations. As Uchibori observes, the transformation of *semengat* into dew and its final absorption by the rice plant

"is the end of the lengthy series of stages through which the *semengat* goes after death ... There is no explicit idea of a cycling of human souls. Certainly the rice, which contains the ancestors' *semengat*, is taken into the living human bodies and generates physical energy to make the Iban 'tough'. But the Iban do not have an idea that the ancestors' *semengat* participate in the formation of the living's spiritual power or in the making of an expected neonate's *semengat*. Rather, Iban eschatology is characterized by a complete lack of an idea of reincarnation or of the 're-cycling' of souls. The *semengat* has its end as well as its beginning" (1978: 254)

This leads him to remark upon the fact that

"The perishable nature of individual *semengat* is, after all, no more than a reflected image of the mortality of individual human beings, though the span of life of the disembodied *semengat* is longer than that of humans as physical entities" (Uchibori 1978: 254)

But while the Iban may deny the notion of a personal immortality, there still remains the idea that the ancient dead are eventually incorporated into the rice crop. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in the fact that the Iban commonly refer to rice as their 'ancestor' (Uchibori 1978: 253-4). They are quite explicit about this connection which leads them to frequently assert that "we should take care of rice plants for they are our ancestors" (Uchibori 1978: 254). Similarly one

finds that the words of a prayer recited at the re-opening of rice bins after they have been ritually sealed for a week following the storage of the harvest, include the lines

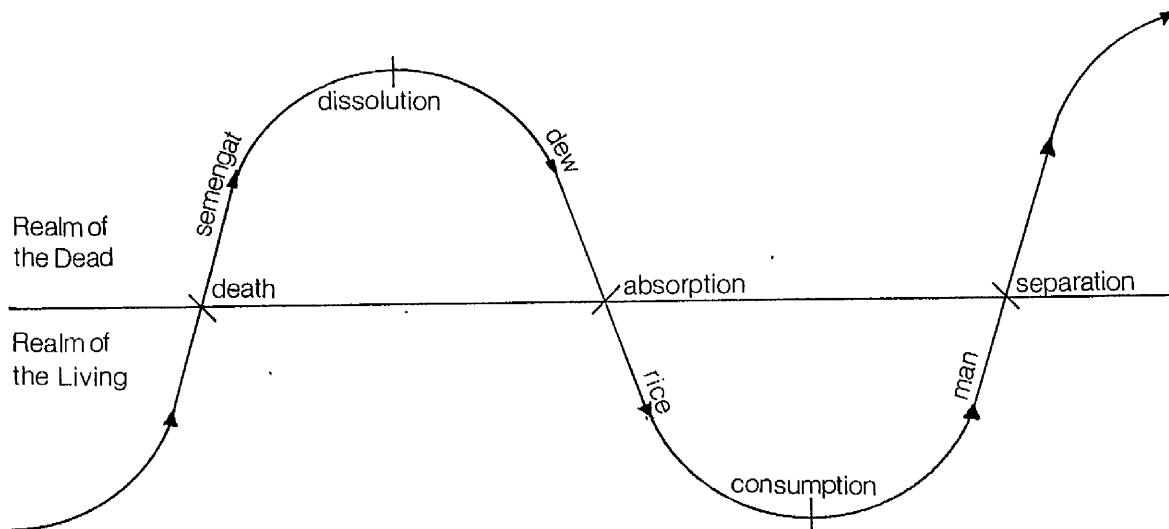
*"Aku minta nuan, aki-ini, apai-indai, seméngat padi;
Muka tibang awak ka ngidup ka aku".*

'I come to take you, ancestors, parents, padi souls;
I open this padi bin so that you may give me life'

(Sather 1980a: 92)

As Sather himself remarks in respect of this imagery: "The Iban describe rice as their ancestor because they see the rice plant as composed, or embodying, the final, transformed element of the souls of those who have died before them" (1980a: 93). In other words, it would appear - in the light of Iban eschatology - that rice and man are perceived, not simply as being alike or in sympathy with one another, but rather as actually 'participating' in one another's existence so that the two may be seen as alternative stages in a continuing process, or organic development, which though not strictly cyclical, oscillates back and forth in the manner of a wave motion (see fig. 3 below)

Figure 3



Rice and man: a discussion

The Iban ethnography presents us, then, with an interesting and complex set of ideas as regards the relationship between man and rice. As we have seen, these consist, to a large extent, of metaphorical assertions that testify to the anthropomorphic nature of both rice, and the *semengat padi*, wherein the source of agricultural fertility lies. At the same time, one also finds that there is an idea of a mystical correlation between the welfare of a *bilek*-family and the state of growth of their rice crop. In the case of Iban eschatology, however, this supposed affinity between man and rice would appear to be taken one stage further, slipping from metaphorical assertions of similitude to metaphysical claims of a shared identity, whereby men and rice are seen to be not only 'alike', but as actually participating in a relationship of co-existence.

The latter view is summarized by Sather as follows:

"Through the ultimate transformation of the human soul into dew, the Iban believe that the spiritual component of their ancestors is thus incorporated (sic) into rice, which, as dew, it sustains and nourishes. Rice, in turn, gives life and nourishment to the living generations of mankind. Thus human existence and the existence of rice are inextricably conjoined" (1980a: 93)

This position, while it is simply expressed, raises a number of problematic issues, relating to the precise nature of this perceived conjunction between rice and man. As we saw earlier, the Iban are themselves somewhat vague about the process whereby the *semengat* of the ancient dead are incorporated into rice plants. Nyuak, for example, would

appear to be suggesting that some notion of consubstantiality may apply when he writes that "in the nether world the soul dies seven times after which it returns to earth in the form of dew which settles in the maturing grain of the rice fields and *becomes part of its substance*" (1977: 183; my emphasis). Jensen, on the other hand, argues that "[i]t is not merely that the *samengat* of rice constitutes a parallel concept to the *samengat* of man, but, in the last instance, a question of actual identification with the Iban since the human *samengat* when it eventually dissolves into dew, is taken up into the ears of rice" (1974: 153).

As I indicated in my epistemological chapter, a proper discussion of indigenous notions of identity, substance and other ontological concerns requires a good grounding in native metaphysics. This is simply not available to us at present in as far as the existing ethnographic literature is concerned. One must therefore be somewhat cautious in accepting the comments of these authors at face value. What does seem clear, however, is that an idea of sustenance provides a vehicle for linking the Iban with the rice they cultivate. That is to say, the incontrovertible biological fact that the consumption of rice sustains and nourishes mankind is taken, and inverted at a representational level, so that in Iban eschatology man - or his dissolute *semengat* - becomes a source of sustenance and nourishment for rice.

This idea of mutual sustenance is quite explicit and rather than worry about the physics, or rather, metaphysics, of such a transaction - which, as I have indicated, lie for the most part beyond the scope of this present analysis - it is perhaps fruitful to consider the implications of such an assertion. In other words, why should the Iban wish to establish such a close relationship between themselves and their rice crop?

At this point I would like to re-consider the overall place of rice cultivation in relation to Iban society and culture. It will be recalled that the Iban self-definition is that of rice farmers (*adat kami bumai*), and that they regard their particular methods of swidden cultivation as divine patrimony conveyed to them via the mediation of their greatest folk hero Surong Gunting. In this respect the Iban way of rice farming - which is as much a question of ritual as it is one of agricultural technique - is for them a statement of ethnicity: it distinguishes them from other agriculturalists and elevates them above the nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes that dwell in the forests (Jensen 1974: 151). The latter point is particularly significant for the Iban themselves recall that their remote ancestors were once like the wandering Punan, living in the jungle like wild creatures, even like *antu* (*baka antu*) (Jensen 1974: 151). In this respect one can therefore argue that to be Iban is, first and foremost, to grow rice according to the *adat* procedures as taught by Lang Sengalang Burong to his grandson Surong Gunting.

Following on from this, it is interesting to reflect briefly upon the profound impact that the adoption of an agricultural economy must have had upon the lives of the ancestral Iban. This moment would probably have occurred at some point in the twelfth century, though it may have been later, following the emergence of large-scale iron smelting operations in western Sarawak (Christie 1985). By this I mean that the dawn of a Bornean iron-age allowed, for the first time, large areas of jungle to be cleared for the planting of rice and it seems likely that it was this shift from a hunter-gatherer economy to one based primarily on the cultivation of rice which saw the emergence of the antecedents of Iban society and culture as we know it today (see pp. 435-439 for further

comments). That is to say, the suggestion is that it was the advent of an agricultural-based economy that allowed Iban predecessors to escape from the constraints imposed by a hunting and gathering mode of existence, thereby enabling the development of a generally more elaborate and sophisticated way of life such as the Iban lead today. The point to be made here, then, is that in this light, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the Iban choose to make such a close identification between themselves and rice, for arguably the adoption of rice farming was the most important single factor in the emergence of Iban society and culture.

It is important to realize in this connection, however, that the division between an Iban way of life - based on the cultivation of rice - and that of their remote ancestors, is not as great as the Iban might themselves wish. That is to say, the idea that the Iban are consistently able to sustain themselves, and fulfill their material needs through the fruits of their agricultural endeavours is, as I indicated earlier, a somewhat idealized picture. Not all *bilek*-families are able to meet their annual requirements of grain, while most have at one time or another had to resort to alternative means of sustenance and livelihood. In the latter situation it is not uncommon to find that the male members of the family will set off on expeditions into the forest to obtain wild sago and other jungle produce, much as pre-Iban ancestors must have done (Freeman 1970: 267).

The point that I wish to make here is that the actual maintenance of Iban society and culture is to a large extent determined by their success at rice farming which is of course at the same time defined by them as the most outstanding feature of their way of life. In other words, should the rice crop fail then the Iban are forced to pursue

demeaning and 'un-Iban' activities in order to survive which include foraging for sago ²⁴ and other jungle produce like the nomadic Punan. In this respect, one can therefore argue that in the most general terms rice farming is both the means and an end of Iban culture; it is the means in that it provides the economic basis for the Iban way of life, but at the same time it is an end in that the Iban way of life is itself defined, by them, as rice farming. In this light then, Iban theories of their co-existence with rice in a relationship of mutual sustenance can be understood as a 'consolidation' of their cultural identity in that it integrates their whole existence, 'body and soul', with the means by which their cultural identity is achieved, which is of course none other than the cultivation of rice.

Summary and conclusion

The cultivation of rice has traditionally played a central role in Iban society and culture. Not only does it supply the economic basis upon which the institutions of Iban society are founded, but at the same time it provides an idiom, or mode of discourse, through which a number of important cultural themes or values are expressed. Thus the Iban say of themselves, "we are rice farmers" (*Adat kami bumai*), and claim that their particular methods of cultivation and associated rituals were passed down to them by their gods and ancestral heroes. The latter idea of rice farming as a kind of divine patrimony bestows upon rice, and the activities associated with its cultivation, a certain sanctity which ultimately can be understood as 'consecrating', or legitimizing, any social or political advantages that may accrue from inequalities in agricultural

productivity between *bilek*-families within the longhouse community. In this last respect, those that do well as rice farmers are seen as following in the traditions of Iban forefathers and as upholders of the Iban way of life.

This particular evaluation of agricultural success is simultaneously underwritten by the notion that the health, integrity, and well-being generally, of each *bilek*-family corresponds, or is related in some mystical manner, to the state of growth of their rice crop, and the annual yield of their harvest. This supposition can be linked to the Iban idea of a similitude between rice and man which is regularly expressed through a series of metaphorical assertions that testify to the anthropomorphic nature both of rice plants and the *semengat padi* who give them life. In this respect rice is cast as a kind of psychic barometer by which an individual family's social and 'spiritual' worth may be judged. This understanding is particularly evident in the case of Iban attitudes towards 'sacred rice' or *padi pun* which, I have argued, can be interpreted as the living embodiment of a collective family identity, acquired over generations of ritual endeavours on the part of previous *bilek* owners.

Ultimately, however, one finds that it is the identity of the Iban people as a whole which, at a representational level, is projected on to the annual rice cycle. That is to say, one of the key tenets of Iban eschatology is that the *semengat* of the ancient dead is, in the end, incorporated into the rice crop of the living, being taken up as dew by the rice plants as they grow in the fields, and providing them with sustenance and nourishment in the same way that rice sustains and nourishes man. Regrettably, the precise nature of this relationship of mutual sustenance must, for the time being, elude us, owing to the

profundity of the questions that it raises as regards Iban metaphysics and indigenous notions of being, substance, identity, and so forth.

Nevertheless, I have argued that at a purely sociological level of explanation, this relationship between man and rice can be interpreted as a reflection of the crucial importance of rice farming to the maintenance of Iban society and the Iban way of life. And if, at present, we cannot be certain of the ontological status of these claims regarding man's co-existence with rice, we nonetheless should note that when the Iban say that rice is 'life itself' (*pengidup*) (Jensen 1974: 152), they may be implying far more than simply that rice is their staple diet.

NOTES - Chapter VI

1. It is interesting to note in this connection that in Sather's analysis of Saribas harvest rituals, the only family still practising hill rice cultivation - as opposed to wet rice (*sawah*), or rubber and pepper farming - in the community studied, was also that of the head man or *tuai rumah* (1977a: 152; 1980a: 70).
2. c.f. p. 145, n.19.
3. Sutlive similarly writes that:
 "It is my observation - and interviews confirm this - that the fortunes of most Iban farmers have generally been unpredictable. A majority of Iban have faced periodic shortages, a time commonly referred to as the 'month(s) when the ladle hangs empty'. In some years supplies have been exhausted long before the new harvest and families have been forced to borrow from others or subsist on other foods" (1978: 26).
4. This idea is clearly evident in the words of an Iban harvest prayer (*sampi*) which describe the ritual procedures as being
 "... in accordance with the practice of our ancestors,
 From time immemorial,
 As performed by our parents in the past" (Sather 1977a: 157)
5. Freeman, like Jensen (1974: 153), would appear to equate *antu padi* with *semengat padi* and use the two terms interchangeably. Sather, on the other hand, reports that in the Saribas region *antu padi* and *semengat padi* are two quite different concepts, although they are related to one another (1977a: 158 n.8). He writes that *antu padi* "is conceived of essentially as an unseen guardian presence that looks after the padi and avenges its injury or abuse" (Sather 1977a: 158 n.8).

6. N.b. the similarity of this imagery with that of Iban creation myths in which the veins of the primordial couple are infused with the blood-red sap of the *kumpang* tree (see p. 154).
7. Uchibori writes that *enterekup* grows "ubiquitously" in Sarawak, but adds that according to the Iban "it is most abundant during the season of clearing the undergrowth in preparation for the new year's rice field, when this grass is cut in great quantities" (1978: 253). This would appear to be significant, given that "the ultimate destiny of the *semengat* is their transformation (or absorption) into rice plants" (Uchibori 1978: 253), but Uchibori's informants did not elaborate on this annual profligation of *enterekup* grass.
8. One should note that many Iban families do in fact cultivate small plantations of sago as a scarcity crop to be consumed in times of rice shortages (Freeman 1970: 267).

CHAPTER VII

WOMEN, FERTILITY AND THE CULTIVATION OF RICE

Introduction

In my last chapter, I considered the significance of rice in Iban social and religious ideology, and I showed how the singular importance of rice at an economic and social level could at the same time be found in the 'religious' character of Iban attitudes towards rice and the mystical significance that surrounds its cultivation. Freeman, in a similar vein, comments that

"From the outset it must be stressed that in studying Iban cultivation of hill *padi*, we are concerned with a larger problem than the description and analysis of agricultural techniques in a subsistence economy. To the Iban, the growing of *padi* is a ritual undertaking, and their whole system of agriculture is based on an elaborate fertility cult" (1970: 153)

He adds that "[i]t is in drawing attention to the significance of this cult that the anthropologist has a special contribution to make" (Freeman 1970: 153), and it is with this salutary advice in mind, that I would like to turn to an examination of underlying ideas and assumptions upon which Iban notions of fertility are constructed.

As far as Freeman himself is concerned, his own analysis of Iban agriculture concentrates almost exclusively upon the conception of *semengat padi* and the significance of these ideas in relation to the structuring and over-all success of the annual rice cycle. The role of gods - most notably Pulang Gana - has also been mentioned in connection with Iban rice farming. The main interest of this chapter, however, lies not with gods or *semengat padi* but with a less immediately apparent set of ideas that are to do with the very nature of agricultural fertility itself, as perceived through Iban eyes. The latter, I shall argue, can again be seen as part of a more general set of ideas, or mode of discourse, in which the existence of man and the natural world of plants are regularly portrayed as being in some way 'alike', or in sympathy with one another.

We have already seen how a botanical model of plant physiology is appropriated by the Iban to provide an aetiological account of health, disease and mortality in human beings (ch. 4). In this chapter, we shall be concerned with a similar set of associations wherein the regenerative life-cycle of plants - and in particular, that of rice - is equated with the circumstances of human reproduction. But whereas in the conception of *ayu* and *bungai* one finds that it is the plant kingdom which provides the Iban with a model for the human condition, in this particular instance the relationship is reversed in that it is human sexuality which provides a

set of images and categories for portraying the generative growth of plants. In other words, one finds that Iban agricultural rites and the imagery of native discourse on rice farming regularly and consistently portray the fertility of rice in terms of the childbearing capacities of Iban women.

This is not an uncommon theme in South East Asia (Rosaldo & Atkinson 1975), but it is not one that has been clearly established in connection with the Iban material. Indeed one finds that this topic is almost entirely neglected in the ethnographic literature which gives very little idea of either the subtlety, or the pervasiveness, of the ideas that are involved in this particular aspect or dimension of the Iban self-identification with their rice crop. My aim here then, is to show how a careful examination of the actual techniques of Iban rice farming, when seen in conjunction with the imagery and ritual procedures that accompany the annual rice cycle, reveals an indigenous model of agricultural fertility that is based upon the circumstances that surround the reproductive lives of Iban women. That is to say, a purely abstract, or analogical, resemblance between the natural increase of rice and the childbearing capacities of women is translated, at a representational level, into a series of associations and correspondences of a metaphorical or allegorical nature, in which the health and generative growth of rice is explicitly linked to the fecundity of women.

This chapter begins, then, with a brief outline of the major events of the annual rice cycle, together with a general account of the essentials of Iban rice farming in as far as planting, weeding, harvesting and related procedures are concerned. This is followed by a discussion of these techniques in the light of Iban agricultural rites and oral

literature relating to the cultivation of rice. In the course of this it is argued that even the most straightforward and apparently 'practical' aspects of Iban rice farming - which includes the division of labour and the allocation of various responsibilities - can be linked, directly, to the systematic portrayal of agricultural fertility and the annual development of the rice crop in terms of the sexual maturation and fecundity of Iban women. The chapter then ends with a general consideration of the implications that these ideas may have in a wider cultural context, particularly in as far as Iban attitudes towards male gender roles and the relationship between men and women are concerned.

Iban agriculture and the farming season

Iban agriculture, as we have seen, is a family affair. In some circumstances, families may be obliged to exchange labour (*bedurok*) - for example, when the *bilek* work force has been depleted by sickness and old age - but even then this works on a strictly reciprocal basis of man hours worked, and does not involve any notion of a corporate venture. Similarly, in as far as ritual matters are concerned, each *bilek* is responsible for conducting its own agricultural ceremonies, and for attending to the needs of the *semangat padi* that abide with their own particular strain of *padi pun*. At certain points in the season, however, the longhouse community may gather together to celebrate an important agricultural ceremony or festival collectively: for example, the rites of *manggol* that inaugurate the rice cycle, or major festivals such as the *gawai batu* (whetstone festival) or *gawai umai* (farm festival)¹. In every other respect, though, farming is a family concern and the care and

maintenance of the rice fields, including their ritual administration, is the sole responsibility of the *bilek*-family to whom they belong.

The farming season commences in June and opens with the rites of *manggol*. These begin with a general ceremony, which is concerned with procuring auspicious bird-omens; propitiating the spirits of the earth and jungle (including Pulang Gana); and inaugurating the major operation of felling by the use of ritual whetstones (*batu pemanggol*) (Freeman 1970: 172-3; Jensen 1974: 160-64). This public ritual is then followed by a further set of rites conducted privately by each *bilek*-family at the site of their prospective farm for that season, when the household head (*tuai bilek*) again prays for fertile soil and invokes the gods' assistance during the coming year.

With the rites of *manggol* successfully completed, work may then begin on the task of clearing (*nebas*) the undergrowth. Both men and women participate in this activity and it is not until the forest floor has been cleared that the men turn their attention to the felling (*nebang*) of the trees. I have already mentioned something of the Iban attitudes towards felling the giant trees of the dipterocarp rain forest, which is frequently portrayed in heroic terms, both in the mythological accounts of the gods and legendary heroes, and in the remembered exploits of previous years. Thus Freeman tells us that "the adventures and mis-adventures of *nebang* are a favourite topic of Iban men, and each year as the new season approaches old stories are told anew, and the tasks that lie ahead relished in advance" (1970: 174). In this respect one finds that it "is the one activity of the farming year in which young men revel, and in many cases it is the only stage in which they deign to participate, for after it is over they set off on journeys (*bejalai*), and do not return

until the harvest is well advanced and the crop ready to be carried in and threshed" (Freeman: 174).

Felling is followed by an interval of a few weeks whilst the fallen trees and dead brushwood are allowed to dry out prior to the firing of the fields. This is a somewhat anxious period as regards weather conditions for if, on the one hand, there is an insufficient spell of dry weather, then the field will burn badly, whilst on the other, if the firing of the fields is delayed too long, then this may severely affect the subsequent timing of the agricultural cycle (see p. 231).

The Iban are acutely aware that either of these situations could seriously undermine the success of their rice crop, and so in some instances they may feel it necessary to intervene with rites and prayers to encourage a stretch of fine weather (Freeman 1970: 177; Jensen 1974: 172-74). If all goes well, however, the burn takes place around the end of August, and planting begins two or three days later.

Freeman tells us that "The Iban method of planting *padi* is a simple, though onerous one", and he adds that "its leading feature is the sharp division of labour between the sexes" (1970: 183). Similarly, Jensen reports that:

"The division of labour is usually clear. The men dibble (*nugal*) using a dibbling stick (*tugal*) which is five to six feet long of a circumference convenient to hold but flaring out at the bottom to make a hole approximately three inches deep and from one and a half to two inches in diameter. The women sow (*menih*), carrying the seed (*benih*) in a small sowing basket (*keban*)"² (1974: 177)

This division of labour during the planting season is a well-defined one, for Freeman mentions that although sowing takes about half as long again as dibbling, so that the men always finish much sooner than the women, "it is rare for men to assist in the work of sowing" (1970: 186). Instead, they turn their attentions to such jobs as clearing the fields of unburnt brushwood, fencing or hut building, or even "merely lounge in the shade to smoke, and chew betel" (Freeman 1970: 186).

A division of labour also extends to the planning and organization of the family's rice fields for in addition to actually planting the rice seed, women are also responsible for deciding on its sowing order. This sowing order is important because of the ritual requirement that the rice crop must be reaped in a continuous sequence. As mentioned earlier, reaping should start at the edge of the field and work towards the centre, with no breaks in continuity lest the *semangat padi*, who are said to follow in the path of the reaper, should miss their way and become lost (Freeman 1970: 189; 213; Sather 1977a: 166-7; 1980a: 72-74). This means that the different varieties of rice that are planted in the field must all reach maturity at the same time, or at least in the correct sequence, so that the reapers can move from one plot to another without any discontinuity in their progress. For this reason, women must be able to not only identify the many different varieties³ of rice seed in their possession, but also know their individual rates of maturation. As a result, Iban women are generally far more knowledgeable about rice, and the characteristics of different strains, than are men. Thus Freeman tells us that

"it is rare to find a man with an accurate knowledge of all the varieties of seed owned by his *bilek-family*. This is essentially the woman's province, and whenever I began to record the names, and

other details of *padi* seed, the man of the family, hopelessly out of his depth, would hurriedly summon his wife, or some other woman of the family to enlighten me" (1970: 191)

The division of labour between men and women in Iban agriculture continues after the planting season, most notably in the almost complete absence - in theory at least - of male participation altogether for it is at this time of year that most men under the age of 35 depart on *bejalai* expeditions (see p. 92-93) (Freeman 1970: 174), while the older men who remain are engaged in farming activities that are to a large extent peripheral to the actual task of nurturing and fostering the growth of the rice crop. This assertion needs some qualification, however, for in the first place, one should not underestimate the importance of the male activities that are associated with rice farming. These include building farm huts, erecting fences, setting animal traps and constructing aeolian bird-scarers. Secondly, one usually finds that the farm is "managed" by the senior male member of the *bilek*-family (Freeman 1970: 224; see also below). Thirdly, one should realize that the release of men from the arduous task of caring for the rice crop as it grows to maturity is very much an ideal situation, and that in real life the demography of individual *bilek*-families may, in many instances, require a fuller participation of its male members in farming duties. Nevertheless, these reservations aside, it is still true to say that whatever the real contribution of male labour in economic terms, at an ideological level, men are only indirectly associated with the care and nurturance of the rice crop as it grows in the fields.

This is very clearly expressed in the context of Iban attitudes towards weeding. Weed growth is one of the most serious difficulties facing swidden agriculturalists, but amongst the Iban the responsibility for this arduous task falls almost entirely upon the women. Freeman tells us that

"[w]eeding (*bantun*, v.f. *mantun*) is predominantly the work of women. Girls begin to join in the work with the approach of adolescence, and they continue year by year until old age prevents their participation" (1970: 193)

A thorough and regular weeding is absolutely vital to the success of the rice crop, and the Iban are well aware of this ⁴, but even so, this knowledge still does not affect the reluctance of Iban men to assist in what they consider to be essentially 'women's work' (Freeman 1970: 195, 229-230). Thus Freeman observes that

"[a]mong young and unmarried men there is a very strong antipathy against having anything to do with weeding: to say the least it is unmanly and anyone who did participate would excite the ridicule of his fellows. Young men are perfectly willing to join in the tougher pursuits of felling and dibbling, but this done they set off - gathering jungle produce, tapping rubber, working for wages - and do not return until the harvest is ready to be threshed, or until the next felling is due to begin" (1970: 195)

It would be misleading, however, to imply that weeding is an exclusively female occupation; inevitably, older men become more involved with their family's farm and in doing so they assist their womenfolk with their responsibilities. Nevertheless, this is still not a particularly

agreeable arrangement for Iban men, and Freeman notes that few men take up weeding before they have reached their middle forties (1970: 195).

This aversion of younger men in respect of agricultural duties is in fact so great that it actually imposes a significant constraint on the productivity of Iban rice farming, which would be a precarious enough undertaking without this further hinderance. For example, Freeman points out that "a crucial limiting factor in Iban agriculture is the area which the women, assisted by the older men, of a *bilek-family* can effectively weed in the time available to them" (1970: 195). This area could obviously be greatly extended if the younger men were also persuaded to participate in weeding, but even the prospects of an increased yield at harvest time and all the material benefits that would ensue from this happy state of affairs, are insufficient to overcome the traditional attitude that weeding is an essentially "feminine" duty (Freeman 1970: 230). Accordingly, one finds that "if sufficient women be available, no man would stoop to the task" (Freeman 1970: 194)

This situation would appear, at first sight, to be somewhat paradoxical, given the economic, social and religious importance of rice in Iban society and culture as discussed in the previous chapter. That is to say that in the light of our earlier arguments as regards the special significance of rice in Iban social and religious ideology one might assume that each *bilek-family* would endeavour to maximize their agricultural productivity by utilizing every available source of manpower. This is evidently not so, which would seem to suggest that our earlier emphasis upon the special importance of Iban rice farming may have been somewhat misplaced. I shall argue below, however, that this is certainly not the case, and that the apparent lack of male enthusiasm for the

arduous tasks of weeding and caring for the rice crop arises, not from their disinterest in the success of the family's harvest, but stems instead from indigenous notions of appropriate male and female gender roles. These ideas are discussed in depth in subsequent sections of this chapter for they are very much related to Iban notions of fertility and so forth. For the present, however, the point to note here is that the division of agricultural labour is clearly marked and that in general it is Iban women who assume most of the responsibility for ensuring the success of the season's harvest.

One should, at this stage, make some comment as regards the nature of Iban farm management. Freeman does not provide a great deal of information about the role of the farm manager, but it would seem that the overall direction of farming is to a greater or lesser extent supervised by the senior man of the *bilek*-family (Freeman 1970: 224). The average age for the assumption of this responsibility is about 35, but this is more a case of necessity than one of choice. Thus Freeman remarks, "[b]ecause of their passion for going on *bejalai*, young men postpone full-time participation in farming for as long as they possibly can: that is, until the male head of the *bilek*-family (i.e., father or father-in-law) dies, or becomes so decrepit that he cannot carry on" (1970: 232-33).

Freeman does not actually specify what is entailed in the responsibilities of "general management", but I would like to point out that one must be careful to distinguish between management and labour in this particular context. In other words, senior men may well supervise family labour, but this does not necessarily alter the fact that it is the women who are primarily responsible for carrying out the tasks that are allocated. Thus one finds that as a general rule, "Iban men do not fully

participate in farm work until obliged to do so by immediate family circumstances" (Freeman 1970: 232).

To return to the agricultural cycle, the quick-ripening rices (*padi muda*) reach maturity in the first half of February, while the main crop is ready for reaping some two weeks later. Again this task is very much a female responsibility, although men may often be roped in to assist in this matter. For example Freeman tells us that when it is time for the harvest to be gathered in "[t]he main brunt of this work falls upon the women .. [although] .. it is usual for men of about 35 years of age and over who are actually managing a farm to offer regular assistance" (1970: 212). Similarly, Sather writes that "the work of reaping is particularly associated with women", but adds that "generally the whole family takes part, joined sometimes by the members of other families on the basis of reciprocal exchange of labour [*bedurok*]" (1980a: 72).

Sather also reports that the reaping party is usually led by the most senior woman in the *bilek*-family - the same individual who organized the lay-out and planting sequence of the rice field at the beginning of the season (1980a: 73). These two tasks are in fact interrelated, and they are both considered to be of vital importance to the success of the season's harvest. This is because of the ritual requirement that the rice crop must be reaped in a continuous sequence, so that the *semangat padi* - who is said to follow in the path of the reapers - will not lose their way en route to the point at which they are to be assembled, prior to their transportation back to the longhouse. For this reason it is not only necessary that the different varieties of rice should ripen in the correct order, but also that the task of actually gathering in the grain must be systematically carried out. Thus at harvest time the reapers move

together as one person, in parallel rows with their leader, those who fall out of line being hastily drawn back into position by hand-clapping and waving (it is said that a mild supernatural 'punishment' befalls those who fail to keep their place) (Sather 1980a: 73).

But if the actual task of reaping itself is primarily the responsibility of the women of the family, then the transportation of the harvested grain from the fields to the longhouse is very much a masculine role, being associated with male strength and endurance. Freeman tells us that as soon as the grain begins to accumulate at the farm hut it is gathered up and carried back to the longhouse by male members of the family in special baskets called *lanji* which, when full, can weigh in excess of 120 lbs (Freeman 1970: 208). As mentioned earlier, this activity provides an opportunity for young men to show off their strength and stamina, and those who excel in this pursuit are said to be 'truly strong' (*kering amat*) (Freeman 1970: 209). Furthermore, it is important to note here that apart from felling at the beginning of the season, the carrying in of the rice harvest (*berangkut padi*) is the only other specifically male-oriented task in the entire agricultural cycle.

Threshing (*nungko*) and winnowing (*muput* or *beribut ka padi*) take place back at the longhouse and are activities in which both men and women participate. The methods vary, but typically the harvested panicles of rice are threshed by collecting them together in heaps and vigorously trampling them under foot (Freeman 1970: 210-11). In this instance, the ritual prohibitions on the rough treatment of rice are relaxed, for as Freeman remarks

"here, as with so many Iban taboos, it is the intention of the perpetrator that matters. If in the course of threshing, a man finds it necessary to tread on the *padi* this causes no offence - the *padi* will understand, it is said; but to walk over the *padi* after it has been threshed is a wilful act, expressing disrespect of which the *padi* spirit [*semengat padi*] is keenly conscious" (1970: 212).

The grain is subsequently separated from the chaff by creating strong lateral draughts of air with a winnowing tray (*capan*) as the threshed *padi* is let fall from a basket held above the head (Freeman 1970: 215-16). It is then raked out on mats on the verandah of the longhouse and allowed to lie in the heat of the sun for a few days. This is said to improve the storing qualities of the rice (Freeman 1970: 216).

The final event of the farming season is the storing away of the harvest in the great bark containers (*tibang*) in the loft (*sadau*) over each family's *bilek* apartment. This is a time of great suspense for each family can at last accurately judge the success, or failure, of the season's labours according to the size and number of bins filled set against the knowledge of previous year's yields and consumption rates. Again both men and women participate in this task: the women scooping the grain into baskets (*baka*), which are then passed up by the men to the loft and emptied into the storage bins. These bins are then sealed - in order to let the *semengat padi* settle down in their new abode - and with the ritual re-opening a week later, the agricultural cycle is completed. By this time it is usually about the middle of May (Jensen 1974: 159), which means there is a brief 'off' season before the annual cycle begins again with the introductory rites of *manggol*.

Briefly, then, in this general outline of the Iban agricultural season, I have concentrated upon the more practical aspects of Iban farming methods. In particular, I have drawn attention to the clearly defined division of labour between the sexes. In commenting upon the latter, Freeman writes

"In general, those tasks requiring great strength and energy fall to the men, while women are responsible for work that is more onerous and time devouring but well within their physical capacities. Again, the division of labour is so arranged that most of the essentially male jobs (e.g. slashing, felling and dibbling) fall within a span of about three or four months (i.e. June-September), leaving the rest of the year free for all those men not actually responsible for the managing of a farm" (1970: 227).

This male freedom has important economic and social implications for it allows Iban men to set off on expeditions (*bejalai*) from which, it is hoped, they will return with brassware, ceramics and other valuable and prestigious items of property which are the 'fruits' of wage labour in the oil fields of Brunei and the timber camps of Sabah. As Freeman points out, the custom of *bejalai*

"is generally approved of, and indeed encouraged, by those who stay at home ...[for] ... the property which a man does succeed in acquiring is put into the general pool of his *bilek-family's* possessions, and thus becomes part of the general family inheritance. In other words, the *bilek-family* as a whole benefits" (1970: 226)

Evidently the custom of *bejalai* can make an important contribution to family fortunes not only in connection with the prestige that is

attached to such ventures but also in economic terms. In this respect the division of labour in Iban agriculture may be interpreted as a 'split-risk policy', adopted in the light of the unpredictable nature of swidden farming, the success of which is dependent upon a number of variables such as weather conditions, soil quality, and so forth. I shall argue here, however, that while the pursuit of such a policy has undoubtedly contributed substantially to Iban prosperity and well-being - not only at the level of individual *bilek*-families, but also in more general terms (below) - the division of agricultural labour between the sexes must be seen as something more than simply an economic strategy to maximize the returns on family resources; rather it is a reflection of traditional notions of male and female gender and corresponding ideas of what are appropriate roles for Iban men and women.

Iban women and the cultivation of rice

We have seen that among the Iban it is women who assume much of the responsibility for ensuring the success of the annual rice harvest, both in terms of the time committed, and the nature of the tasks allocated to them. Thus Freeman writes that

"All Iban women, with the exception of those incapacitated by old age or sickness, participate year by year in the arduous routine of farm work. While the young men gad off on their journeys, their sisters stay at home to sow, weed and reap. It is upon the women of a *bilek*-family that the main effort of *padi* cultivation falls, and in particular, the responsibility of selecting, processing and storing seed; deciding upon the planting order of the farm; and looking after the charms (*pengarah*) and magical plants (*sengkenyang*) associated with *padi* rituals" (1970: 227-28).

He adds:

"This system of division of work between the sexes is supported by various social sanctions, and particularly by the strongly held traditional attitudes of young men. Young men are perfectly willing to join in the manly tasks of felling, dibbling, and the carrying in of huge loads of *padi* for threshing, but nothing will persuade them to participate in the essentially feminine duties of sowing, weeding and reaping. To do so would excite the immediate ridicule of their fellows, and, of shame, the Iban are extremely sensitive" (1970: 229-30).

In short, Iban agriculture is characterized by a marked division of labour, and although men do assist in several important ways - i.e., in felling, carrying in the rice, and other, physically strenuous activities - the major responsibility for the cultivation of rice falls predominantly upon women.

Both Freeman and Jensen, in their respective accounts of Iban agricultural practices have remarked upon this asymmetrical division of labour between the two sexes, but neither author volunteers an explanation as to why this should be so, other than to observe that it allows the men time to go away on expeditions and so forth. Apart from certain instances when great physical exertion is required - such as in the felling of trees and so forth - there is no qualitative differences between the agricultural labour of men and that of women. This suggests that the Iban division of agricultural labour - where the burden of the responsibility falls mainly upon the women - may be largely determined by cultural factors, rather than by constraints imposed by the nature of the activities involved.

Turning then to Iban accounts of the origins of rice farming one finds, in the oral literature, a set of myths that can readily be interpreted as legitimizing the unequal participation of men and women in the arduous tasks of the annual rice cycle. I refer here to the story of Dayang Petri which tells of a time when rice required no attention whatsoever, in that once planted it grew for many years, fruiting continuously, with the ripe grain jumping into baskets that, of their own accord, walked back and forth between longhouse and rice field bearing a never ending supply of rice (Howell 1977: 25; Banks 1949: 83; Sutlive 1977: 160; Richards 1981: 243). The fabulous grain even husked, winnowed, and dried itself, but sadly this idyllic situation was eventually brought to an end by the impetuous actions of a woman by the name of Dayang Petri. First she tried her hand at reaping one day, thus terminating the remarkable self-harvesting properties of rice. Then, on another occasion, she surprised the rice as it was taking itself home from the fields, with similar adverse results. Finally, in frustration at the harm she had caused, Dayang Petri took a stick and beat the *padi* as it was drying itself, thus ending forever the miraculous attributes of rice and necessitating the commencement of rice farming as we know it today.

This account of the origins of Iban agriculture can evidently be interpreted in a Malinowskian sense as a mythological 'charter' that justifies the allocation of the major share of agricultural responsibility to women who were, it is suggested, initially responsible for this being necessary in the first place. One can, however, also discern another set of ideas at work in the Iban representation of rice farming which, I shall argue, can ultimately be linked to an indigenous model of agricultural fertility in which the natural increase of rice is metaphorically equated

with the fecundity of the women who are responsible for its cultivation. That is to say that while the myth of Dayang Peteri 'blames' women for the necessity of agricultural labour, further reading of the ethnographic literature strongly suggests that the sexual asymmetry of Iban agricultural practices can be alternatively understood in terms of traditional conceptions of gender and, in particular, that the emphasis on female labour can be related to, or is consistent with, an indigenous idea of women as the custodians, or agents, of fertility, both agricultural and human.

Before proceeding any further, it must at once be pointed out that Sutlive has recently remarked upon the "important role of women in the Iban symbolism of fertility" (1979: 111). He does not, however, elaborate on this theme, other than to provide a couple of brief examples of instances where Iban women are apparently assigned certain agricultural tasks - namely the reaping and storing of ripened grain - on the basis of their reproductive capacities (see below). These observations aside, one finds virtually no mention in the existing ethnographic record of any connection between agricultural fertility on the one hand, and the fecundity of women on the other. Not in any explicit sense that is, for I shall argue below that a careful re-examination of the sources reveals the existence of a systematic set of images and ritual associations linking women cultivators with their rice crop on the basis of the notion of a 'shared', or 'common' fertility. Accordingly, it is my intention here, first to propound this indigenous model of fertility, and then to explore the various implications that arise from the equation of women's reproductive role with the circumstances of agricultural production.

Motherhood and the planting of rice

Rosaldo & Atkinson (1975) have drawn attention to a common association, found in many areas of South East Asia, wherein some kind of connection is made between the fertility of crops and the fecundity of women who are responsible for their cultivation. The authors remark that "[e]xplicit birth imagery in the context of agricultural rites is found throughout the area, suggesting that female fertility serves as an idiom for associating the women cultivators and their crops" (1975: 64). In the course of their discussion, Rosaldo & Atkinson refer to a widely distributed myth which concerns "the origin of rice from the body, often the dismembered body, of a dead woman" (1975: 65). They also mention a variation of this theme which tells of "a creator couple who chop up their child, and bury the pieces, thereby causing rice and other edible plants to sprout" (1975: 65). Rosaldo & Atkinson comment that "In all these myths, the offspring of women's bodies become plant foods, not people", and they go on to argue that "this image unites women's reproductive functions and their role as providers of plant food" (1975: 65).

Similar themes can also be found in Iban mythology. For example, in one story, Siti Permani, the daughter of Bunsu Petara who created the universe, is cut up into pieces which subsequently turn into rice, pumpkins and other edible vegetables (Howell 1977: 24), while in another, Siti Awa, the wife of the first man, gives birth to a child who is killed and dismembered by her husband, each piece becoming transformed into "useful plants" (Richards 1981: 19). Clearly, these two accounts are virtually identical to the versions recorded by Rosaldo & Atkinson, but perhaps even more significant, as far as our present interests are concerned, is the

myth of Kumang's daughter. Kumang, it will be recalled, is the wife of the legendary hero Keling and paragon of Iban womanhood, and in this particular story she is described as giving birth to a daughter who is born a matron but then grows progressively younger (Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896 I: 336; Sutlive 1977: 158). The name of this 'child' is Padi Mati Bejalai Lemi Pinggang, Benih Lalu Tugal Sa-Taun Mati Mawang, which can be translated as "Ripe padi becomes young and gives life to new seed" (Sutlive 1977: 158), and Brooke-Low comments that "this inversion of order is allegorical - the ripe seed, after being planted, becoming young and giving life to new seed" (Ling Roth 1896 I: 336).

The point to be made here is that these three Iban stories are linked by a common theme in which woman is depicted as the 'mother' of rice, or else as the physical, or corporeal, agency responsible for its inception. Thus in the myth of Kumang's daughter, the child is explicitly identified with the re-generative life-cycle of rice, while in the myth of Siti Permani, rice is portrayed as being, quite literally, the fruits of her (dismembered) body. In other words, these myths can be grouped together as transformations of a single theme in which the first rice is portrayed as arising from the body of woman, be it as her child or, more directly, as a metamorphosis of her body itself. The argument that I would like to put forward here, then, is that this mythical identification of woman and rice should be read as an assertion of a primordial connection or correspondence between the physiology and fecundity of women on the one hand, and the natural fertility of rice on the other, and furthermore, that it is this mythological association which sustains - at a logical level, if not a causal one - the sharp division of labour between the sexes bound during the planting season.

To elaborate, Freeman, Jensen and others have all commented upon the sharp division of labour during the planting season (*nugal*), but on no occasion has the author concerned made any attempt to explain why, or how, this distinction between male and female roles is made. Elsewhere, however, in discussing the imagery of an Iban allegory (see pp. 362-363), Freeman tells us that "the action of dibbling ... is seen as symbolic of sexual intercourse" (1979: 244), while in his dictionary, Richard mentions that Iban dibblers (*tugal*) "are carved to represent a phallus (*jegal*)" (1981: 397). In other words, the ethnographic evidence suggests that the emphatically male task of dibbling during the planting season is regarded by the Iban as corresponding in some way with the role of men in sexual intercourse.

The Iban are well aware of the connection between sexual intercourse and conception, but their interpretation of these events would appear to differ somewhat from a Western biological account of this process. In the first place, the Iban feel that sexual intercourse must take place several times before conception can occur (Jensen 1967: 166), while secondly, the foetus itself is said to arise from a coagulation of blood in the woman's womb (Jensen 1967: 168; 1974: 107). In other words, although the Iban recognize the fact that sexual intercourse is a necessary prelude to pregnancy, this does not actually indicate that their understanding of the reproductive process is identical to our own. Indeed, as we have just seen, the development of the foetus is regarded as a thickening of the mother's (menstrual?) blood, and it is this aspect of the Iban theory of conception which is of special interest to us here for there is a striking parallel to be found in the mythological account of the birth of Pulang Gana.

Pulang Gana, it will be recalled, is the owner of the soil and the paramount god of Iban agriculture, and Perham tells us that he was born to the deity Simpang Impang, who

"at her first accouchement brought forth nothing but blood which was thrown away into a hole of the earth. This by some mystical means, became Pulang Gana, who therefore lives in the bowels of the earth and has sovereign rights over it" (1881: 146-47)

Jensen has recorded an identical version from the Undup river, and Howell also mentions a very similar story in which "Petara [see pp. 116-117] gave birth to a boy who was without his members [i.e., just blood?] and cast him into a pit, when he became Pulang Gana the god of the earth" (1977: 24).

What I wish to suggest here is that the description of Pulang Gana as being at first just blood and only subsequently developing a body and limbs, can in fact be interpreted as an implicit reference to the Iban theory of embryological development where the foetus is regarded as arising from a coagulation of the woman's blood. Furthermore, the combination of Pulang Gana's status as the paramount god of Iban rice farming, together with the fact that this blood is deposited in the earth⁵, suggests that this myth can also be understood as an assertion equating agricultural fertility with the fecundity of women whereby the soil is identified with the womb, and germination with gestation.

This association of ideas can be presented as an analogy based on formal correspondences. By this I mean women can be regarded both as the 'containers' of early human life, and also as the source of nourishment by which this life is sustained. In this respect their role is analogous with

that of the soil, and it is this correspondence which is played upon in the myth of Pulang Gana's birth, where the blood of Simpang Impang's first delivery is poured into a hole in the ground only to develop subsequently into Pulang Gana. That is to say, the life-giving and life-sustaining role of women as the bearers of children can, in certain lights, be aligned with the generative capacity of the earth, and it is this purely formal correspondence, I suggest, which subsequently allows the Iban to equate the processes of agricultural germination with those of human conception and gestation, as is implicitly mooted in the myth of Pulang Gana's origin.

Returning then to the rationale that underlies Iban planting procedures, the argument that I would like to put forward here is that once set against this mythological background the significance of the division of labour between men and women on such occasions becomes immediately apparent. Quite simply, the task of dibbling is assigned to men on the grounds that the dibble is invested with phallic connotations and that the actual 'penetration' of the soil can be equated with copulation as seen from a male perspective. Women, on the other hand, are allocated the task of handling the rice seed and placing it in the 'womb' of the earth on the basis of their biological role as the 'containers' and sustainers of emergent life in the human cycle of reproduction⁶. In this last respect it is important to note that the wife of Pulang Gana is called Serentum Tanah Tumboh, which translates as "Serentum, the Fertile Soil" (*tanah* = soil [Richards 1981: 365]; *tumboh* = to grow or shoot up, as of plants [Richards 1981: 339]). What is more, her daughter - ie., the fruit of this soil - is known by the title of 'seed dissolving in the soil' (Sutlive 1979: 111).

Pursuing these correspondences further, one finds that Freeman specifically mentions that the task of plaiting *keban* - an elaborately decorated basket, made especially for the purpose of carrying rice seed during the course of planting - "is woman's work" (1970: 184). He also tells us that it is replenished from a larger container of seed known as an *uyut* (Freeman 1970: 184), and this may again be of some significance for the term *uyut* is also used to refer to a swing or hammock in which infants are rocked to sleep (Richards 1981: 415). One should also note here that while there is a prohibition (*pemali*) on pregnant women touching a corpse in case their unborn child emerges deformed (*menawa'*) (Uchibori 1978: 52), there is at the same time a general ban on farmwork lest the rice crop be similarly injured (*menawa'*) and produce a poor harvest (Uchibori 1978: 77). The latter prohibition is not aimed specifically at women, but the similarity of the ideas and the use of an identical term for the deformity that ensues from transgressions of this edict, suggest that a parallel is again being drawn between the circumstances of human reproduction and the generative cycle of rice. In other words, there are a number of further details which although they may at first sight appear to be incidental, do in fact concur with our argument that the idea of motherhood and female fecundity is of the greatest significance to the internal 'logic' of Iban rice planting rituals and practices.

At the same time, it will be evident that our analysis is supported by the myths of Siti Permani, Siti Awa and Kumang's daughter, which, I have argued, can be read as assertions of a primordial correspondence between, on the one hand, rice and the circumstances relating to its growth and increase, and on the other, the physiology and fecundity of women. Furthermore, it is also consistent with the collective

representation of rice and the *semangat padi* in anthropomorphic terms, and with the numerous parallels that the Iban draw between their own lives and existence, and that of their rice crop (see ch. 6). Then again, the ethnographic evidence agrees with Rosaldo & Atkinson's more general claim that throughout South East Asia "female fertility serves as an idiom for associating ... women cultivators with their crops" (see above). In short, it seems that the division of Iban agricultural labour between the sexes at the time of planting can be understood in terms of an underlying set of ideas or principles in which the fecundity of Iban women - seen here as the 'efficient cause' (in an Aristotelian sense) of human reproduction - is metaphorically equated with the fertility of the rice seed they grow.

Before going any further, I must quickly point out that my interpretations here are not based solely on the evidence that I have so far presented in the context of Iban planting procedures. Rather they are arrived at partly on the basis of a far wider set of associations and inferences that can be discerned at almost any stage in the annual rice cycle. It is, then, to this more general set of parallels between female fertility and the natural increase of rice that I would now like to turn.

Female fertility and the natural increase of rice

As one might expect, the Iban pay close attention to the maturation of their rice crop and in doing so they employ a number of different classificatory terms to describe the various stages in the growth and development of the rice plant (Freeman 1970: 196nl; Jensen 1974: 184-6). Some of these classifications are based directly on what one might call 'empirical observation'. For example, rice at one stage is described as

being 'above the small logs' (*ngelampong batang anak*), and later, as 'tall enough to wet the sarong of a Bukitan woman' (ie., with dew) (*basak kain Beketan*) (Freeman 1970: 196n1). Others, however, may involve metaphorical comparisons such as when the rice plant is described as 'the hairs of the nose' (*ngelemu idong*), or, alternatively, as 'the tail of the rice sparrow' (*niko pipit*) (Freeman 1970: 196 n.1).

What is of interest to us here, however, is the fact that several of these classificatory terms, or descriptions, refer to the rice crop as if it were a child in the process of growing up. For example, one finds that in those areas where the Iban have gone over to the cultivation of wet rice, the seedlings growing in the nurseries (prior to their transplantation to the main rice fields) are described as 'infants' or 'children' (*anak padi*)⁷ (Sutlive 1978: caption to photograph between pp. 86-87; Sandin 1980: 47; Richards 1981: 242). Elsewhere, in the Baleh where the Iban still cultivate their rice in the traditional manner of swidden farming, Freeman reports that at a more advanced stage in the season, the rice plants are said to be like a young girl (*dara biak*), and then subsequently, like a slightly older, but still unmarried, maiden (*dara tuai*) (1970: 196 n.9; see also Jensen 1974: 185). The latter two categories are especially interesting in that in both instances rice is specifically identified as being female. This suggests that the growth and maturation of the rice crop is seen by the Iban as being in some way comparable to that of the women who care for it, and this inference is corroborated by Sather, who tells us that "the Iban take delight in the appearance of ripened grain and its 'comeliness' and 'beauty' are explicitly likened to that of a young woman" (1977a: 161). Furthermore, he goes on to remark that "[c]ontained in the symbolic association of ripeness and maidenhood

is also an idea of potential fertility, of future fruitfulness and rebirth, embodied by the ripened grain".

The theme of maidenhood and future fertility recalls, of course, the myth of Kumang's daughter, and the allegorical significance of her name, 'Ripe-Padi-Becomes-Young-And-Gives-Life-to-New-Seed' (see above), while the idea of beauty or comeliness can be related more specifically to an implicit theme of sexuality that underlies this native model of agricultural fertility. We have already seen the latter in the phallic significance that is attributed to dibbling and similar attitudes can also be discerned in certain ritual proscriptions that are to do with the performance of a *gawai batu* or whetstone festival. These ceremonies are held in response to a succession of poor harvests and as a prelude to the commencement of a new agricultural season. We are told that on such occasions, the principal officiant who washes the whetstones and makes the offerings to the gods must be, not only a successful rice farmer, but also free from adultery (Howell 1977: 101; Sutlive 1978: 68). According to Sutlive, the latter stipulation is because

"human sexual behavior is analogous [sic] with and important to the development of the rice crop. As with man, so with rice, and vice versa. Because of the socially unacceptable pregnancies - though not the sexual acts *per se* - by which bastards are conceived, such persons are prohibited from entering the rice fields of other families, lest the rice die" (1978: 68).

This ritual edict relating to adultery can, on the one hand, be interpreted simply as a further example of the close parallel that the Iban draw between their own existence and that of rice, whereby occurrences in one

sphere - in this instance, that of social relations - are simultaneously reflected in the other - in this instance as an adverse influence on the health of the rice crop. On the other hand, however, it does at the same time specifically relate the circumstances of human sexuality to the growth and fertility of rice. I shall have more to say on this subject presently, but for the moment, I wish merely to draw attention to the existence of a sexual element, or dimension, in this indigenous model of reproduction. That is to say, while women may be regarded as the physiological agents, or 'efficient cause' (see p. 290), of reproduction, they nevertheless require the assistance of men - either as sexual partners, or else, in the case of the rice cycle, as dibblers - in order to initiate the proceedings. In this respect, rice should be not only ripe and healthy, but also desirable so as to instigate the requisite response in men - hence the imagery of feminine beauty and comeliness.

These ideas are particularly stressed in the Saribas rites of *nanchang padi* which inaugurate the rice harvest. On such occasions, the ritual attention is focused upon a clump of standing *padi*, bound together with red thread, and 'consecrated' with the blood of a sacrificed fowl (Sather 1977a). This "natural shrine" - the *padi tanchang* - acts as an assembly point where the *semangat padi* can congregate during the course of the harvest, and subsequently, at its conclusion, when the *padi tanchang* is ceremoniously reaped, it provides the means by which they are transported back to the longhouse, there to await the advent of a new agricultural season. In other words, among the Saribas Iban the *padi tanchang* has superseded the ritual role ascribed to the *padi pun* in other Iban communities. The important point to note here, however (at least in as far as our present interests are concerned), is the fact that once the

ritual binding has been completed, the *padi tanchang* is "figuratively addressed as a 'maiden', or *dara*" (Sather 1977a: 161). Thus Sather writes:

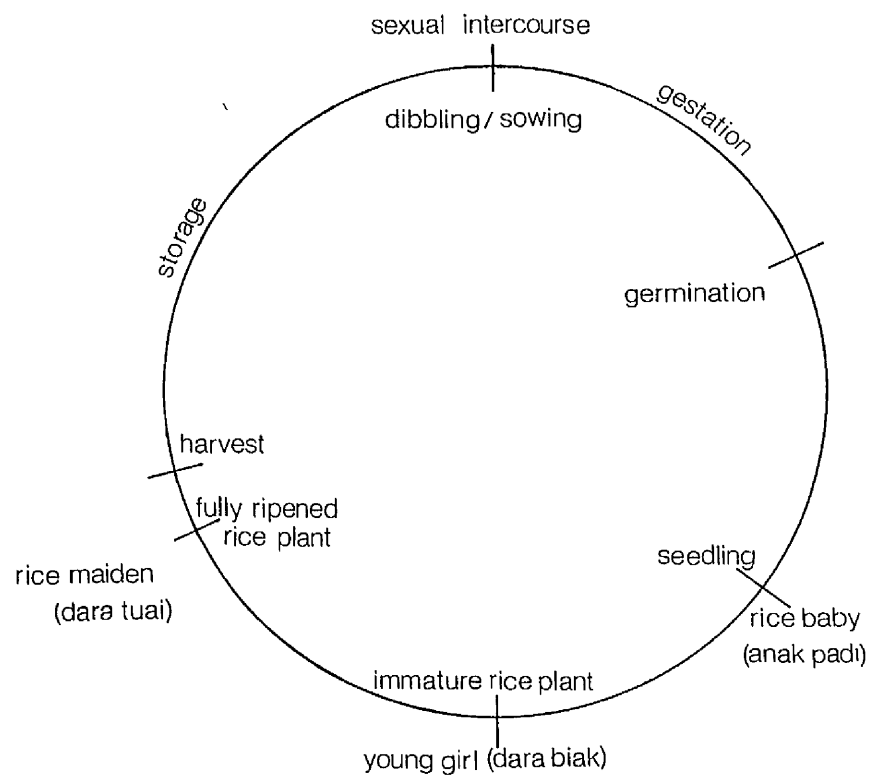
"Having attained maturity, or 'maidenhood', the *padi tanchang*, representing here the collective souls of the now ripened padi, is addressed as if it were a young woman about to be received in ceremonial welcome by the longhouse from which she has long been absent, having passed her 'childhood' in the padi field" (1977a: 161).

The imagery of maidenhood in this context can again be related to the idea of a future or potential fecundity as embodied in the ripened grain. By this I mean that the *padi tanchang* - in its role as a receptacle for the aggregate *semangat padi* of the family's rice field, and as the vehicle by which they are returned to the longhouse for the interval between farming seasons - can, for the duration of the harvest, be regarded as the principal locus of agricultural fertility and the primary source of future fecundity and fruitfulness. The latter notion is, of course, of crucial importance to the family concerned for it is upon this store of potential or latent fertility that the outcome of subsequent farming seasons depends, and the suggestion here is that it is this prospect of future agricultural success which is highlighted and anticipated in the theme of maidenhood which underwrites the Saribas harvest rites of *nanchang padi*.

In brief summary then, the rites of *nanchang padi* - when seen in conjunction with the ritual significance of Iban planting methods, and various metaphorical descriptions of maturing rice plants as 'children',

'young girls', and 'unmarried maidens' - can be interpreted as further evidence of an indigenous model of agricultural fertility in which the ripening of rice is systematically likened to the passage of Iban women from infancy, through childhood, to sexual maturity. In this light there is evidently a double identification of Iban women with the circumstances of agricultural production in that on the one hand they are identified with the soil as the containers and sustainers of new life, while on the other, their lives provide an iconographic model for the collective representation of various stages in the growth and maturation of the annual rice crop. These alternative perspectives on the relationship of Iban women to the annual rice cycle manifest themselves at a mythological level in the names or titles of Pulang Gana's wife ('Serentum, the Fertile Soil') and daughter ('Seed Dissolving in the Soil'), and in that of the daughter of Kumang (Ripe Padi Becomes Young and Gives Life to New Seed') (see above). Each of these can be readily linked to different stages in the rice cycle which can itself be represented diagrammatically in the following way:

Figure 4: The Annual Rice Cycle



There is, however, a need for some circumspection here for non-Saribas areas include a further stage in this scheme of things when the mature rice crop is described as 'pregnant' (*kandong*) (Freeman 1970: 196 n.9; Banks 1949: 81; Jensen 1974: 185; Richards 1981: 137). This identification is quite explicit for the Iban directly compare the swollen panicles of grain with the body of a woman with child: '*kandong indu, batang iya besai, endang baka orang indu ngandong*' ('female fruiting or with child, with swollen stem just like a pregnant woman') (Jensen 1974: 185). What is more, one finds that Richards, in his description of the harvest rites of *matah padi*, actually states that "[t]he woman of the house must be present to act as midwife to the grain which is spoken of as *kandong* (pregnant)" (1981: 97).

Freeman and Jensen also mention the rites of *matah padi* - which in many respects resemble the Saribas *nanchang padi* ceremony in that they similarly involve the ritual binding of *padi* with red thread and so forth (Freeman 1970: 203; Jensen 1974: 189-90) - but in neither instance do they refer to any kind of 'female' imagery, be it that of child birth or maidenhood. It is perhaps significant, though, that Jensen specifically calls attention to the similarity between Iban rites of *matah padi* and Malay harvest ceremonies where the theme of ritual childbirth is most definitely expressed (Endicott 1970: 23-24, 146-51). He does not, however, draw any conclusions as regards the interpretation of Iban harvest rites from this apparent congruence^e.

But if Richards' claim that the rites of *matah padi* involve a notion of ritual childbirth remains unsubstantiated by the accounts of other authors, the imagery of pregnancy at the time of the rice harvest is certainly well documented (above). In this light it is apparent that there

is something of a discrepancy between the Saribas account of the maturation of rice, and that of other Iban areas. By this I mean that whereas in the Saribas region the rice cycle ends with the ripened grain being compared to a young maiden, elsewhere the season finishes with the pregnancy of rice and (possibly) its ritual delivery in the rites of *matah padi*.

At first sight, the Saribas version would appear to be more 'consistent' in that if dibbling is aligned with sexual intercourse, then planting can be equated with conception; germination with pregnancy and childbirth; and the subsequent growth and maturation of the rice crop, with childhood and puberty; so that the cycle concludes with the fully ripened rice plant being described as a sexually fertile and receptive maiden, who is ready to be 'impregnated' at the beginning of the next season when the men take up their phallic dibblers again. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the second half of the name or title of Pulang Gana's daughter is given as 'Maid of the Pleiades Until Ready' (Sutlive 1978: 70). The Pleiades - which incidently are depicted as seven sisters - are employed by the Iban as a signal for the firing of their rice fields. This takes place in September when the stars are at their zenith at day-break (Jensen 1974: 156), and is of course immediately followed by the planting season. The suggestion here, then, is that the reference to Pulang Gana's daughter as 'Maid of the Pleiades Until Ready' can be understood as an allusion to her latent or potential fertility (it will be recalled that she is simultaneously known as 'Seed Dissolving in the Soil' (p. 288), a fertility which must remain dormant until the right time of year when the rice seed is to be sown (i.e. when signaled by the alignment of Pleiades at dawn).

The 'problem' with the alternative, and by all accounts more widespread, version is that the annual rice cycle ends, not with maidenhood, but rather with the ripened rice crop being described as 'pregnant'. This, at first sight, would appear to be inconsistent with the collective representation of dibbling as sexual intercourse which, in terms of sequential continuity, would seem to be misplaced. On reflection, however, this apparent discrepancy may have more to do with a different understanding of the role of sexual intercourse - at least at a representational level - than the manifestation of some Iban idiosyncrasy. In this connection it is therefore particularly important to note that there are in fact two distinct stages in the mythological account of Pulang Gana's birth, the first being his delivery as 'just blood', and the second being his subsequent development after this blood has been poured into the soil (see p. 287). The suggestion here is that the pregnancy of rice at harvest time can be equated with the first stage in this mythological allegory of the initial sequence of the rice cycle, while planting and germination are aligned with the second, dibbling being the point of transition from one stage to the other.

This interpretation raises interesting questions as regards the precise nature of intercourse in the Iban understanding of sexual relations (for example, it may be seen as opening a passage for the release of a child that is already growing in the woman's womb). More importantly, however, it draws attention to a most crucial stage in the rice cycle, namely the period between farming seasons when the harvested grain, some of which will provide the seed for next year's crop, is stored away in the loft above each family's *bilek* apartment. It is to this interval, and the

Iban idea of a supernatural increase of rice which is associated with it, that I would now like to turn.

Female fertility and the supernatural increase of rice

Freeman tells us that the Iban "are persuaded that *padi* can miraculously increase or decrease in quantity after it has been reaped, just as it can in the fields" (1970: 210). These ideas are linked to the concept of *semengat padi*, for as Freeman observes "[t]he operative belief here is that the *padi* has a spirit, and that the departure of this spirit may result in the diminution of grain itself" (1970: 210). And indeed, as Freeman goes on to point out,

"after threshing and winnowing, the *padi* (i.e. originally stored in panicle form) of different *bilek-families* behaves in very different ways. Whereas in some cases there is a normal and expected decrease in quantity, in other cases the loss is much more marked" (1970: 210).

This is due of course to environmental differences between farms and varying degrees of infestation by insect pests. The Iban, however, take a mystical view, and for this reason the rites that accompany the storing away of the harvested grain (*besimpan padi*) are perhaps the most important in the whole agricultural cycle, as far as the Iban are concerned.

Freeman writes that

"The final storing away [of the harvested grain] is an event of great importance, for the Iban believe that if the correct rituals

are faithfully performed their *padi* will last longer, that it will not be used up so quickly as would otherwise be the case. They believe that the supernatural qualities of fertility and increase which are the special attributes of *padi* are still present after the grain has been reaped, threshed, winnowed and stored. Everything depends on taking the necessary safeguards against injurious and alien influences, and in winning the esteem of the *padi* spirits by the proper rituals" (1970: 216-17).

Similarly, Sather reports that

"[t]his ... idea, that rice may actually swell in volume, underlies virtually all of the rituals connected with *besimpan*. The Iban believe that rice, even after it is threshed and installed in the *tibang* [storage bin], continues to possess the special power of fecundity and increase ... By showing it respect, and through careful observance of ritual, every family attempts to gain its continuing favour in order to preserve this power which is thought to reside in the *semengat*, or soul, of the *padi*" (1980a: 86)

This notion of supernatural increase is referred to by the term *jedian*. *Jedian* describes the properties of inexhaustibility and longlastingness, and in the case of rice it refers to its capacity to increase in volume even after it has been harvested (Sather 1980a: 86; Richards 1981: 125). Every *bilek*-family owns special charms which are believed to encourage and promote this quality (*ubat jedian*), and when the time comes to store away the rice after it has been threshed, winnowed and dried in the sun, these charms are placed in the bark storage bins (*tibang*) in the lofts (*sadaw*) above each *bilek* apartment to ensure that the season's harvest will be longlasting and slow to diminish. Needless to say, these charms are a most highly prized possession - like the *padi pun* with which they are associated, they are never lent or given away, but

are handed down from one generation to another - and, as with other items of ritual or technological value, they are associated with a tutelary spirit - in this instance Ini Andan.

What is of chief interest to us here is the imagery through which these ideas are expressed or given form. Most significantly one should note that the tutelary spirit Ini Andan - who is both the source and guardian of *ubat jedian* - is personified as a female character. What is more, the *ubat jedian* which she possesses are most commonly portrayed in the oral literature as archetypically feminine artefacts and implements - a cook-pot (*priok*); a hearthstone (*batu tungku*); a petrified weaving heddle (*batu letan*) - all of which are described as belonging to Ini Andan (Sather 1980a: 86-87). In short, one finds that just as in the mundane world women are allocated the responsibility for looking after the family's rice charms - among them *ubat jedian* (Freeman 1970: 228) - in Iban mythology the custodian of *ubat jedian* is similarly portrayed as a female figure while the *ubat jedian* themselves are depicted as feminine objects.

Ini Andan is in fact the sister of Lang Sengalang Burong and Pulang Gana, and the only female sibling in a family of six brothers (see p. 114). She is described as being ageless, remaining forever young (Sather 1980a: 86), and these qualities may be seen as a reflection of the properties of *jedian*. In other words, Ini Andan can be regarded as the personification of the concept of *jedian*, and it is in this respect, I suggest, that her gender is of particular importance, especially when seen in the light of an otherwise entirely male bias as regards the other members of Lang's immediate family. By this I mean that it is significant that the deity who is most intimately concerned with the supernatural increase of rice

should be portrayed as a woman - and a young woman at that - for this imagery, I submit, can again be seen as a further reflection of an indigenous model of agricultural fertility that systematically links the increase of rice to the fecundity of the women who are responsible for its cultivation.

To elaborate, the theme of eternal youth can be interpreted as an implicit reference to an everlasting fertility, or capacity to bear children, while the account of her in the oral literature - where she is described as being as beautiful as a *jirak* flower, and like "a young maiden...[who]... is courted nightly by bachelors" (Sather 1980a:86) - serves to emphasize the underlying element of sexuality that I referred to earlier. No mention, however, is ever made of Ini Andan being married, or having children, and so it would appear that it is again the notion of a future, or potential, fecundity that is being projected here. In other words, in the context of the rites of *besimpan*, the emphasis falls upon the latent fertility of the rice seed (or gathered-in *semengat padi*). In this respect then, Ini Andan is the archetypical rice-maiden, embodying in her ever-youthful beauty and vigour, the promise of future fecundity and fruitfulness.

But while the imagery surrounding Ini Andan may emphasize the latent fertility of the rice seed, it is important to note that the rites of *besimpan* (storage) are in fact aimed at exploiting this inherent quality so as to bring about a supernatural increase of rice as it lies in storage in the family's loft. In this respect it is therefore interesting to find that in the lower Rejang at least, it is the senior most female member of the *bilek*-family who is ultimately responsible for filling the

bark storage bins (*tibang*) at the end of the farming season (Sutlive 1978: 83). This, according to Sutlive, can be directly linked to

"[t]he symbolism of fertility [which] marks this climatic event in the rice year, just as it has every other aspect ... Seed is handled by women in sowing. And it is woman who replaces seed in the family's womb of life" (1978: 83)

As I mentioned earlier, Sutlive does not elaborate upon this indigenous notion of fertility, but his description of the family's rice storage bin as the "womb of life" - when seen in conjunction with the idea of a supernatural increase of rice - suggests that the interval between farming seasons may be regarded as a period of 'gestation' for the 'pregnant' rice, the bark storage bins providing a suitable container, or surrogate 'womb', until the beginning of the new rice cycle when the rice seed is transferred to the earth. In this connection it is interesting to consider the role of senior most woman in the *bilek*-family in relation to the annual rice cycle. As we have seen, she is responsible, not only for the storage of the season's harvest, but also for leading both planting and reaping. In the latter instance, her activities are described by the term *ngindu* (Sutlive 1978: 80; Sather 1980a: 73) *ngindu* being the verbal form of the noun *indu*, meaning woman, mother, female, feminine (Richards 1981: 115). The specific use of the term *ngindu* leads Sutlive to suggest that in the particular context of the rice harvest the term *ngindu* should be translated as to 'fecundize' or 'feminize' (1978: 80). He writes:

"Harvesting has its ritual as well as its technical aspects and focuses on the dominant concern with fertility. The lead is taken by

the senior active woman who sets the pace in cutting the grain in each family's field. It is she who 'fecundizes' or 'feminizes' - the Iban term for her pacesetting, *ngindu*, being a verb form of the root *indu* meaning 'woman' or 'source' (Sutlive 1978: 80).

This posited identification of reaping with the bestowal of fertility may shed some light on Richard's observation that the women of the *bilek*-family must attend the rites of *matah padi* so as to "act as midwife to the grain which is said to be *kandong* (pregnant)" (above). In this instance, however, the rites of *matah padi* might be better understood, not as ritual childbirth, but rather as the means by which the season's grain is transferred from the 'pregnant' rice plants to the surrogate 'womb' of the family's rice bins. Here it is hoped that the harvested grain will continue to increase in volume - under the benign influence of *Ini Andan* and the *ubat jedian* - until such a time when it is ready to be transferred again to the soil at the start of a new agricultural season.

It must be pointed out, however, that Sather has questioned Sutlive's interpretation of *ngindu*, noting that the term *indu* can also be translated as meaning 'premier', or 'leading example', while *ngindu* itself is generally used in the sense of 'taking precedence' or 'leading', and can thus be understood as referring to the role of the senior woman as director of the rice harvest (1980a: 73 n9). But this two-fold meaning of *indu/ngindu* might in itself be significant in that it may reflect an underlying conception of 'femaleness' as a generative principle, or woman as the ultimate source of life. In this connection, one should therefore note that Richards etymologically derives the Iban word '*indu*' from a Sanskrit term meaning (among other things) 'life-giving' (1981: 115).

Absence of sufficient data unfortunately precludes the possibility of pursuing this line of inquiry further. However, it should be recorded here that even Sather, while voicing his reservations as regards Sutlive's translation of *ngindu*, nevertheless feels obliged to add that "[t]his is not to deny ... the importance of the notion of fertility in harvest rituals nor that women are seen as the custodians of family fertility, both human and agricultural" (1980a: 73 n.9). Regrettably, he does not choose to elaborate upon these remarks, hence the present attempt to unravel some of the underlying ideas and assumptions that are implicitly alluded to in this observation.

As far as the actual rites of *besimpan* are themselves concerned, one learns that these are again performed by the most senior female member of the *bilek* and centre around the ritual activation of the family's *ubat jedian* (Sather 1980a: 84ff.). This is done by heating (*nangas*)⁹, or more correctly, smoking, them in the fumes that are put off from a special preparation of incense. The ingredients of the latter include aromatic bark (*garu*) and resin (*menyan*), but most importantly consist of the dried blossoms of the 'sacred' flowers that are planted each season around the *padi pun*. I referred earlier to these 'sacred' flowers as *sengkenyang* (p. 245), but it is important to note that they are also known by the term *indu padi* which can be translated quite literally as 'mother of *padi*' (Jensen 1974: 182-83; Richards 1981: 115). In this capacity they are said to both protect and safeguard the health of the rice crop, and at the same time to amuse and entertain the *semangat padi* (Freeman 1970: 189; Jensen 1974: 182-3 n.2; Sather 1977a: 156; 1980a: 85; Richards 1981: 84, 351). Furthermore, Sather tells us that these 'planted flowers' (*bunga tanam*) are also regarded as a "symbol of the *bilek*-family's collective life force, or

state of healthfulness, reflecting here a parallel association with rice" (1980a: 85)¹⁰.

At the end of each farming season these magical plants are gathered in with the reaping of the *padi pun* - by the women of the family it should be noted - and the flowers saved and dried to be used for various ritual purposes, among them the rites of *besimpan*. On this occasion these dried blossoms (*rampang bunga*) are mixed with a number of other ingredients, as I mentioned above, to make up a bowl of incense which is then set alight. The fumes of this ritual preparation are said to make the family's *ubat jedian* effective (*sidi*) and to enhance their power (*ngasi*). At the same time the sweet smelling smoke is also said to exert a powerful "spiritual attraction" over the *semengat padi* which, it is hoped, will keep them from straying during their sojourn in the rice loft for the period between farming seasons (Sather 1980a: 85).

The important thing to note here is the very nature of this "spiritual attraction" for one learns that these dried flowers may *also* be used by Iban women as love charms (*jayau*) to summon a distant lover. Thus Sather informs us that

"The smoke of the *rampang bunga* is not only fragrant, but is said to exert a powerful spiritual attraction. Here it is thought to attract the padi souls [*semengat padi*] in the same way that dried flowers, when burned as a love charm, are believed to draw back a distant sweetheart. A markedly amorous element is associated with this attraction, for traditionally women used the dried *rampang bunga* to perfume their sleeping place" (1980a: 85).

In other words, although the magical *sengkenyang* plants are primarily employed in an agricultural setting where, as the *indu padi*, they encourage

the fertility of rice, one finds that their dried blossoms may alternatively be used to perfume the beds of Iban maidens, attracting lovers to their sides, and thereby promoting the fecundity of Iban womanhood. In either instance, the *sengkenyang* are seen as assisting in the processes of reproduction - the one agricultural, the other human - and the suggestion here is that this overlap, or correspondence, can again be seen as arising from an indigenous equation of the fertility of women with that of rice.

In summary, then, an examination of Iban post-harvest rituals and storage procedures reveals the continued association of women with agriculture and the metaphorical identification of female fertility with the increase of rice - in this instance a mystical increase that is said to occur after the crop has been harvested. These ideas are drawn together and consolidated in the persona of *Ini Andan* who, I have argued, can be considered as the archetypical rice maiden. In this respect the imagery of female fertility - latent or otherwise - is found to be present at every stage in the annual rice-cycle, drawing together the generative capacities of women and rice in a single model of reproduction and increase.

Agricultural festivals and the celebration of womanhood

There remains one further aspect of the association, in Iban collective representations, between the fecundity of women and the fertility of rice, that I have yet to consider, and this is to do with the portrayal of women in the text of the chants that accompany major agricultural festivals. As already mentioned, the *gawai*, or festival, plays

a central role in Iban religious life, and those that are to do with agriculture are second only to headhunting ceremonies in terms of their importance. On such occasions, invitations are sent to Pulang Gana and Anda Mara, the latter deity being another brother of Pulang Gana and Lang Sengalang Burong, and the tutelary spirit of prosperity and good fortune. It is hoped that they will both attend the festival being celebrated, and that they will bring with them various charms to assist their hosts in their agricultural endeavours - for example *sengkenyang* plants to protect and safeguard the rice crop as it grows in the fields, or *ubat jedian* to encourage its increase after it has been reaped. In this particular instance, however, we are not so much concerned with the main body of chants (*pengap*), which deal with the sending of the invitation to Pulang Gana and so forth (see p. 136-137 for a general description of Iban festival chants), but rather with the concluding sequences where the attention is switched from the deities to their human hosts who are at this point praised and flattered for their efforts and hospitality.

At all Iban festivals - be they agricultural or otherwise - the main body of chants are completed by a section that extols the merits, in stylized form, of the men and women of the longhouse. These 'praise songs' (*nenjang*) are again performed by the *lemembang* (bards) who portray their hosts and hostesses as the legendary heroes and heroines of Iban mythology, and describe how the deities who have attended the festival intermingle with them, and present them with the various charms that they have brought especially for the occasion. Typically, men receive charms to make them courageous in war and successful at headhunting, while the women obtain charms to enhance their skills in weaving and agriculture (Howell 1977: 103; Sandin 1962: 404-406; 1967b: 361 ff.; 1968b: 90 ff.;

1980: 51). Richards reports, however, that whereas at headhunting festivals such as *gawai kenyalang* (the hornbill festival), the verses are addressed chiefly to men, those at agricultural festivals are centred around the women (1981: 71; see also Sather 1980a: 87 n.31). This is in itself worth noting, for it again would seem to reflect the general notion that it is women who are primarily responsible for the cultivation of rice, but what is especially interesting in this particular instance, is the very nature of the way in which women are depicted in the text of these stylized eulogies.

The praise songs at agricultural festivals begin by describing the women of the longhouse'' as seated between female members of the divine company, among them Serentum Tanah Tumbuh, the wife of Pulang Gana (Sandin 1962: 404; 1967b: 365, 368). Having established this convivial setting, the verses then go on to create a vivid imaginary picture of acres of ripening padi, growing luxuriantly on the hillsides:

*Mansang meh padi bangang
Baka gumbang nanga sungai.
Lalu angkat meh padi amat.
Baka bakat balat bebungai.
Lalu nyadi meh padi wee,
Ari kaki nyentok ka serarai.
Nyau mansau meh padi randau.
Sama satangkai.*

The *bangang* padi grow flourishingly.
Like waves at the river mouth.
Grow up padi *amat*,
Like waves of a rough sea
The padi *wee* is growing luxuriantly,
From the hill foot up to the top.
The padi *randau* is gradually ripening.
As if they were in the same stalk.

(Sandin 1962: 405; 1967b: 366)

This imaginative scene is of course a reflection of the anticipated outcome of the current celebrations, and with this marvellous projection of the future in mind, the song continues by describing the various gifts that the gods have brought with them for their mortal hosts. These, as might be expected, are primarily aimed at assisting the women of the community to reap the miraculous harvest foretold in the preceeding verses:

*Enti nuan matah ila,
Indai Tingang Bakah,
Pinta tulong batu getah,
Ngambi ka enda berubah nyingkang bejalai,
Enti nuan ngetau ila Indai Samalau Mukau,
Pinta tulong batu randau
Ngambi ka enda sasegau jauh bejalai.
Enti nuan berangkut ila Indai Ensulit Laut,
Pinta tulong batu semut,
Ngambi ka berebut jampat datai.
Enti nuan muang ka Indai Bansi Banjang,
Enda pedis nuan ngisi bidang lambar bidai.
Enti nuan ngindik ila Indai Bansik Burik,
Ngambi ka iya begilik laboh bekaberai.
Enti nuan ngetau ila Indai Semalau Mukau,
Minta tulong batu kamarau,
Ngambi ka padi jampat rangkai.
Enti nuan besimpan ila Indai Burong Dan.
Minta saup batu jadian,
Beri Andan Ini Andai,
Awak ka enda pedis nuan ngisi tundan tibang chamai.
Dalam chitak bedau lidak-lidak,
Tuntun kechiak imbai kerigai.
Dalam takaran apin ga nya lenok-lenok,
Baka penudok tuan datai,
Dalam idas bedau ga apin abis kerepas,
Teda kita mas mau raii.*

If you start to reap,
Mother of Tingang Bakah,
You had better ask for help from the rubber stone charm,
So that you shall not change your gait,
If you are harvesting, mother of Semalau Mukau,
You [had] better ask for help from the creeper stone charm,
So that you shall not stray too far.
If you carry back your grain in future, mother of Ensulit Laut,
You had better ask help from the ant stone charm,

In order to hasten your arrival.
 If you empty your grain from the carrying basket, mother of Bansi
 Banjang,
 It will not be difficult for you to fill up the *bidai* mat.
 If you tread the grain, the mother of Bansik Burik,
 It will easily fall from its stalks.
 At the time of harvest, mother of Semalau Mukau,
 You [had] better ask help from the dry weather-stone,
 In order that your grain is quickly dried.
 If you keep your grain, mother of Burong Dan.
 You [had] better ask for help from the magically inexhaustible
 stone.
 Given by Ini Andan, the mother of Andai,
 So that it is easy for you to fill your padi bin.
 The *sitak* box is still full,
 As high as the armpits by the ribs.
 There still remains some in the carrying baskets,
 Like the cut down stump of a *kelampai* tree,
 The contents of the *uyok* basket have not yet been used,
 Like a seat of honour of visiting *tuan*.
 The contents of the mat are not yet finished,
 Being the remainder left after we have bought gold.
 (Sandin 1962: 405-406; 1967b: 366-367; 369)

The portrayal of women as cultivators in these verses is, of course,
 perfectly consistent with the reality of Iban agriculture, where the burden
 and responsibility for the cultivation of rice falls predominantly upon the
 female members of a *bilek*-family. However, having alluded to the role of
 Iban women as rice agriculturalists, the praise songs then suddenly take a
 rather different direction and begin to eulogize upon the theme of feminine
 beauty and charm, and in particular, to comment upon the loveliness of
 Iban maidens (*indu dara*) and adolescent girls (*indu angkat dara*- lit.
 'females becoming maidens'). This switch in emphasis appears somewhat
 curious at first sight, but the suggestion here is that these verses should
 in fact be interpreted as nothing other than an allegory of the annual
 rice cycle and that the allied themes of maidenhood and feminine beauty
 can, in this context, as elsewhere, be understood as metaphorical allusions

to the latent fertility of the ripened grain and the hoped for prospect of future fecundity and fruitfulness in subsequent seasons.

The full text of these songs in praise of maidenhood and female adolescence is too long to include here, but can be found instead in appendix B. Briefly, however, this section of the festival chants begins with the bard, or *lemembang*, favourably comparing the young women of the longhouse with Kumang - the wife of Keling and paragon of Iban womanhood - and other female consorts of the legendary heroes. But having established their virtues in this respect, the *lemembang* laments that even so he cannot begin to do full justice to the beauty and charm of the women of the longhouse: were this a headhunting festival, he sings, then he could liken their health and vigour to the war canoes of the legendary heroes; sadly this is not the case for it is the "merry festival of Raja Simpulang Gana", and so the women must accept his humble and inadequate attempts to do them justice.

Having set the scene, so to speak, the *lemembang* then proceeds to describe, in a highly stylized form, the major events in the life-history of a young Iban woman, from the moment that she was conceived by her mother, to the present time of speaking, when the news of her maturity and beauty has spread and she is sought by bachelors from far and wide. In this section great attention is paid to the construction of the young woman's sleeping platform, or "bedstead" (*papan*), which is described as being ornately carved and painted by the legendary heroes; perfumed with scent and blossom of flowers; and enclosed by a most delicate mosquito net. The special attention that is paid here to the maiden's sleeping place is particularly significant for one learns elsewhere that on reaching the age of young maidenhood (*indu angkat dara*) "a girl must ... separate

herself from her parents and sleep alone on a bedstead newly made for her by her father" (Sandin 1980: 68). This separation of a young girl from her parental sleeping place facilitates the subsequent 'night-visits' (*ngayap*) of potential suitors who, as is the Iban custom, may visit the bed of their sweethearts and sleep with them, on the understanding that they will accept their responsibilities and marry the girl should she fall pregnant (Ling Roth 1896 I: 110; Ward 1961: 98; Beavitt 1967; Jensen 1974: 36; Richards 1981: 98). In this respect then it seems likely that the repeated reference to the girl's sleeping place can in fact be understood as an allusion to the sexual encounters that may occur there, and in the light of the constantly stressed theme of female beauty and attractiveness one can argue that this section of the festival chants is in reality a barely concealed appraisal of the sexual maturity and desirability of the young women to whom they are addressed. This hypothesis is supported by the number of references to *balong*, *belitong* and *kapu* flowers (see appendix B), which as I mentioned earlier are used by Iban women as love charms (*jayau*) to attract a distant lover. In other words, the suggestion here is that the *nenjang indu dara* and *nenjang indu angkat dara* praise songs are nothing less than a celebration of Iban womanhood and female sexuality - in short, an Iban Song of Solomon.

This allusion to feminine beauty and female sexuality is, in itself, of special interest to us, given the context in which it is found - namely the concluding stages of an agricultural festival. One can, however, go a step further and argue that these songs in praise of Iban women can in fact be understood at another level as an allegorical representation of the annual rice cycle.

To elaborate, the central concern of this chapter has been the way in which Iban women are identified with their rice crop on the basis of the notion of a shared, or common, fertility. In this respect, I have argued, the lives of Iban women and the circumstances of their sex can be seen as providing an iconographic model of agricultural production and increase. Following on from this, the suggestion here then, is that the somewhat curious emphasis of the songs in praise of women, as sung at agricultural festivals, can in fact be interpreted as elements in an allegorical portrayal of the annual rice cycle in which the maturation of rice is systematically equated with successive stages in the life-history of Iban women¹². For example, the preoccupation with the young girl's sleeping place and the floral love charms that are placed there, can be read as an allusion to the *panggal benih*, or seed pillow, where the *padi pun* is planted and which is itself surrounded by magical *sengkenyang* plants whose dried blossoms perfume the beds of Iban maidens. That is to say that if on the one hand, the *panggal benih* can be regarded as the seat of agricultural fertility - in that it is the site of the *padi pun* and hence the principal abode of the *semangat padi* - on the other, the bed of Iban maidenhood - with its implicit references to *ngayap* courtship and love-making - can similarly be identified as the seat of female fecundity. This purely formal correspondence is underwritten, or 'substantiated', by the fact that in both instances the processes of reproduction are thought to be actively encouraged by the magical qualities of the *sengkenyang* flowers which, in an agricultural context, enhance the fertility of the *padi pun* and the *semangat padi* that reside there, or otherwise assist in attracting distant lovers in the sphere of human relations. In this last respect, the dual role of the *sengkenyang* flowers implicitly hints that

there may be a more 'intimate' resemblance between the fertility of rice and the fecundity of Iban women than simply that of an analogical equivalence.

The allegorical interpretation of these verses gains further support from the fact that the songs in praise of women at other festive occasions - i.e. non-agricultural *gawai* where the theme of female fertility and fecundity is not directly relevant - specifically state that they will *not* refer to the woman's "past history, [w]hen your body was still young during the days of your maidenhood" (Sandin 1977: 164); nor will they "speak of your past, [w]hen a bedstead was specially made for you" (Sandin 1977: 164). Instead they concentrate upon other feminine attributes and qualities - for example, their skill as weavers, which, as I mentioned earlier, is frequently described as the female equivalent of headhunting and warfare. In other words, the declaration here that the themes of feminine beauty, desirability, maidenhood, and so forth, are inappropriate in a non-agricultural setting can, in itself, be understood as an indirect assertion of the special significance of these ideas and images on the occasion of a major farming festival.

In summary then, the stylized account of the lives of Iban girls and maidens, as set forth in the praise songs that conclude an agricultural festival should, I suggest, be read as an allegorical representation of the annual rice cycle. In this respect, the verses reiterate the metaphorical imagery of Iban farming rites and agricultural discourse which regularly identifies the growth and increase of rice with the lives of the women who are primarily responsible for its cultivation. And, as elsewhere, it is the imagery of maidenhood - with its implicit promise of future fecundity

and fruitfulness - which predominates, thus reflecting the precarious nature of Iban rice farming, where even a good year cannot entirely remove the anxiety of future crop failures and the threat of subsequent hardship and deprivation.

Conclusion

Rice farming can in many respects be said to lie at the very heart of Iban society and culture, and as we have seen in earlier chapters, the actual cultivation of rice is, for the Iban, as much a ritual concern as it is one of agricultural technique. In the course of the present chapter, I have therefore sought to uncover some of the principal themes or conditions that underlie Iban notions of agricultural fertility and relate them to the particular way in which the Iban go about the cultivation of rice. Beginning with the actual farming methods themselves we found that there is a very marked division of labour between men and women so that in general terms one can say that it is Iban women who are primarily responsible for ensuring the success of the annual rice cycle. This is not to deny the very real importance of male participation throughout the year, but by and large it is women who contribute the bulk of agricultural labour and who are generally better acquainted with the botanical aspects of rice farming - witness their superior knowledge of seed varieties, differing rates of maturation and so forth. In this respect one can claim that for the Iban, rice farming is primarily identified as the work of women - an attitude that is clearly to be seen in the extreme reticence of young men to assist in anything but the most glamorous tasks of the

farming season (eg. felling, or carrying in the harvest) for fear of the reflection that this might have upon their manhood.

The evident sexual asymmetries of Iban agricultural labour raise the question of why this should be the case - especially in the light of the great significance that is attached to rice and its cultivation in Iban social and religious ideology. To this end, attention was shifted from the practical side of Iban farming to a consideration of the ritual nature of Iban agricultural activities. In doing so it was revealed that many aspects or stages of the annual rice cycle are repeatedly described in terms of a set of images that are drawn from the domain of childbearing and female fecundity. Moreover, at a mythological level woman is portrayed as the 'mother' of rice, or at least the physiological agent responsible for its inception, while the circumstances of Pulang Gana's birth can be readily identified with Iban notions of conception and embryological development. In short, one finds that Iban agricultural rites and oral literature frequently turn to the imagery of female fertility and fecundity as an idiom for linking women cultivators with their rice crop.

These associations are particularly evident in the text of the songs in praise of women (*nenjang indu*) that conclude the main body of chants performed at major agricultural ceremonies or *gawai*. The narrative sequences of these verses, I have suggested, can be interpreted as an allegorical account of the annual rice cycle. That is to say, they describe various stages in the childhood and adolescence of Iban maidens which echo the imagery found elsewhere in Iban agricultural discourse whereby the seasonal growth and maturation of the rice crop is portrayed through the lives of the women who cultivate it. In this respect, the

praise songs reiterate the myth of Kumang's daughter, whose name and life-story can similarly be interpreted as an allegory of the annual development of rice from the seed to the ripened grain.

In summary, then, one finds that Iban oral literature and ritual imagery regularly depict women as the cultivators of rice and that this allocation of responsibility is simultaneously underwritten, or legitimated, by a series of metaphorical assertions and mythological 'explanations' in which a parallel is drawn between the fertility of rice and the fecundity of Iban women. In other words, women are portrayed, not just simply as rice farmers *par excellence*, but they are actually 'identified' with their rice crop on the basis of a postulated similitude between their capacity to bear children and the natural increase of rice. This situation thus raises a most crucial issue as regards the relationship between men and women, and the evaluation of male and female gender roles. That is to say, if women are represented as the principal agents of reproduction - both human and agricultural - what significance is attributed to Iban men in this scheme of things? Certainly, Iban theories of procreation recognize the sexual role of men in the reproductive cycle, but at a representational level this contribution is dismissed simply as 'dibbling', while it is women who are identified as being primarily responsible - in the sense of being the 'efficient cause' - for the processes of reproduction, both human and agricultural.

Analytically, the 'problem' is that given the great importance that is attached to rice farming and social continuity in Iban society and culture, one might expect that women - as the 'custodians of fertility' - would be ascribed a special status in relation to their menfolk. One finds, however, that the contrary is true in that of the two sexes it is

men who are socially ascendant, and who have the greatest honours bestowed upon them for their achievements - particularly in the field of war - despite the egalitarian nature of Iban *adat* in as far as social, economic and jural rights are concerned. Why is this so? And how is this apparently paradoxical evaluation of male and female gender roles supported at an ideological level ? It is in order to answer these questions that we must now turn our attention to that other bastion of Iban society and culture, namely headhunting, which, together with rice farming, has traditionally been central to the Iban way of life.

NOTES - Chapter VII

1. The *gawai batu* or whetstone festival is celebrated periodically, usually in response to a succession of bad harvests, or else when there are new ritual whetstones (*batu pemanggol*) to be consecrated. Harrisson & Sandin comment that it is one of the most important of Iban festivals "since it is aimed at refreshing the whole ricecycle and re-grading the Iban economy so fully based on the rice fields" (1966: 241). The *gawai umai* or farm festival, on the other hand, is held in order to remove blight, vermin or some other form of pestilence and to restore the health of an ailing rice crop. To this end the *semengat* of the agent responsible is dispatched from the fields by being set adrift in a model boat on the nearest river, and Pulang Gana is summoned to plant new seedlings in the place of those that are diseased or have been consumed. (Sandin 1967b: 254 f.f.).
2. Sutlive also mentions that "Hill-farms are planted by men and women, between whom there exists a clear division of labor. Men dibble, women sow" (1978: 75; c.f. Brooke-Low 1892: 24; Sandin 1967b: 252, 1980: 16).
3. Freeman reports one family with 18 different strains of rice (1970: 191).
4. Freeman writes:
 "Time and again I overheard such statements as 'If the weeding is not thoroughly done there will not be a good crop' ('*Enti enda mantun bada badas enda bulih padi*'); 'Amid weeds padi refuses to thrive' ('*Alam babas enggai padi idup*'); and 'The grain of unweeded padi lacks substance' ('*Padi enda di mantun nadai isi*'). On another occasion a group of men made the point that after a thorough weeding insect pests are fewer, and this is greatly to the advantage of the growing padi" (1970: 193).
5. n.b. It is interesting to note in this connection that on the occasion of a *gawai batu* or whetstone festival, the blood of a sacrificed pig is actually poured into a hole in the ground which is especially dug for this purpose (Sandin 1962: 395). One should also

note that the *semangat* of the ancient dead return as dew, which fertilizes the growing rice crop, and that this process can be seen at work in the red sap of the *enterekup* grass which is known as 'the blood of the dead' (*darah sebayan*) (see p. 252).

6. It must be pointed out that Sandin does in fact mention that "Early on the second morning after burning the farm, a senior woman of the farmer's family starts to dibble five holes for planting seeds in the ground" (1980: 15). He does not, however, offer any explanation as to the significance of this ritual planting, nor does he account for the name given to this act, which is *ngenchuri tegalan*, or 'stealing the scorched earth' (Sandin 1980: 15), but it should of course be noted that in this instance the seed holes are actually dibbled by a woman. Quite why this is so is unclear to me at present but it seems likely that it may have some bearing on the significance of other planting procedures.

7. The term *anak* may actually be used in a more general sense to denote the quality of youthfulness or immaturity, thus rendering *anak padi* simply as 'young rice'. Richards, however, specifically translates *anak padi* as "rice baby" and likens their role at transplanting rites to that of a corn dolly (1981: 242). Furthermore, photographic evidence shows that during these ceremonies young Iban women carry the wet rice seedling on their hips, supported by a blanket slung around one shoulder, as they would their offspring (Sutlive 1978: between pp. 86-87). One should also note in this connection, that although men may assist in the transportation of these seedlings from the nursery to the *padi* fields, the actual transplanting itself is always the task of women (Sutlive 1979: 11 n.7).

8. Banks provides an interesting anecdote which may have some bearing on this issue. He tells the story of an altercation between Iban farmers and a party of bark strippers which arose because the employers of the latter had instructed them to fell and strip the bark of some mangrove trees that were growing in the vicinity of Iban rice fields (1949: 81). Bank writes:

"the rice grain in the nearby fields were swelling with ripeness, for which the term *bunting* was used just as in pregnancy. No man fells trees when his wife is in this state, the sap which flows is too much like a haemorrhage" (1949: 81)

This, unfortunately, was exactly what the bark collectors had done; and it was this offence, albeit unintentionally committed, which had caused the outrage of the local farmers. In other words, it would appear that some areas not only describe the ripened rice plant as 'pregnant', but also actually observe certain pregnancy restrictions (*pemali*) at the time of the rice harvest.

9. n.b. in this particular instance heat is ascribed a positive significance, which contrasts with the inauspicious connotations of *angat* in other contexts (see, for example, pp. 99, 176-177, 199)
10. For example, one species of lily (*Euryclis amboinensis*), is very resilient and does not die even when uprooted and dried out (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 192). Accordingly it is taken as an emblem of fertility and it is stored at the end of each season with the harvested grain, only to be re-planted the following year with the start of a new agricultural cycle (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 192).
11. Sandin reports that these songs in praise of women are sung to each female member of the longhouse in turn and may thus last a whole day if the community is a large one (1977: 167)
12. The words themselves suggest as much, for towards the end of this song the *lemembang* declares that he is becoming tired of speaking in 'parables' (*karau nyawa* - lit. 'twilight speech') (Sandin 1967b: 382, 396), which hints that the content of the preceeding verses should be taken at rather more than face-value.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEADHUNTING AND FECUNDITY

Introduction

We have seen in chapter VI that man's relationship to rice is perceived by the Iban, or at least portrayed by them at a representational level, as a symmetrical one that turns on a notion of mutual sustenance. That is to say that on the one hand, rice provides the Iban with their staple diet and thus sustains them in their daily lives, while on the other, the ancient dead - or more strictly speaking, their dissolute *semengat* - are said to nourish and sustain the rice crop as it grows in the fields. The precise nature of this relationship, for reasons that I have discussed above (p. 253, pp. 256-257), must remain for the time being unclear, but as I indicated earlier, there may be some evidence for an ontological commitment to this scheme. Whatever the case, at a purely formal level this symmetrical relationship between man and rice is quite explicit and, I have argued, can be readily linked to a series of other correspondences, or parallels, that are drawn by the Iban between their own existence and that of their rice crop. These include the anthropomorphic, and indeed sociocentric, portrayal of the *semengat padi*;

the mystical identification of family health and well-being with the success of the rice harvest; and the postulated correlation that is drawn between agricultural fertility and the fecundity of women.

At first sight, this exchange of qualities and attributes between man and rice appears to be straightforward. On closer inspection, however, certain analytical problems arise in as far as the symmetrical nature of this scheme is concerned. These stem from the metaphorical identification of agricultural fertility with the fecundity of Iban women. To elaborate, we have seen, in the previous chapter, how the natural increase of rice is regularly and systematically described by the Iban through images of female physiology and childbearing, and how similar themes can also be found both in Iban mythology and in the mystical notion of a supernatural increase of rice. In this respect, I suggested, the imagery of female fecundity serves as an idiom for linking women cultivators with their rice crop. I concluded, however, with the observation that behind this association of ideas there lurks a most fundamental issue, namely the role of Iban men in such a scheme of things. By this I meant that although Iban collective representations draw a number of parallels or correspondences between the existence of rice and the lives of both men and women, when it comes to the circumstances of production and reproduction, there is apparently a very marked asymmetry between the sexes in terms of the varying degrees of 'responsibility' that are attributed to men and women. In other words, in the light of the metaphorical identification of the growth and increase of rice with childbearing and the fecundity of women, one is faced with the 'problem' of locating men and male sexuality in what is an ostensibly vegetative and female mode of reproduction.

As I have already pointed out, the Iban do recognize the role of men as sexual partners in the process of human reproduction, and some attempt is made to incorporate this situation into the collective representation of the annual rice cycle when the specifically male task of dibbling is identified with sexual congress (p. 286). Generally speaking, however, men play a largely peripheral role in the processes of reproduction, be it human or agricultural, and given the self-propagating nature of rice - whose fertility and natural increase is identified with the fecundity of women - one is left with the implicit question: 'What are men for?'; 'What do they do?'

The issue is a familiar one to anthropologists, for Lévi-Strauss, in his analysis of the myth of Oedipus, addresses exactly the same problem. He writes,

"The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous (see, for instance, Pausanias, VIII, xxix, 4: plants provide a *model* for humans), to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman" (1979a: 216).

This is precisely the same anomaly that faces the Iban, for in a culture where the existence of mankind and society is regularly compared to, or identified with, the life of plants, and where the cultivation of rice - which is itself imbued with deep religious significance - is correlated with the fecundity of women, the necessary fact of sexual union creates an immediate paradox. That is to say that on the one hand, Iban oral literature and ritual imagery regularly links the capacity of Iban women

to bear children to the vegetative or self-propagating increase of rice, but on the other, one has the existence of two sexes, *both* of which are ultimately equally important in the joint reproduction of themselves. The latter fact is irrefutable and in this respect it would at first sight appear to create a certain inconsistency in the logic of Iban collective representations in as far as indigenous theories of fertility and reproduction are concerned. There is, however, an answer to this 'problem', and it is in the cultural resolution of this apparent inconsistency that the chief interest of this chapter lies.

Briefly, the key issue that concerns us here is the question of the ways - if any - in which Iban men are seen to contribute to the fertility of either women, or rice, or both. We have seen that the necessity of sexual intercourse is recognized by the Iban as a fact of life, but that the circumstances of human reproduction and agricultural production place the emphasis on the role of women as the principal agents of fertility - at least in a physiological sense. This suggests that a possible 'explanation' or account of the male role in this scheme of things may be found elsewhere in some other activity which, though distinct from the allied domains of childbearing and rice farming, is nevertheless regarded as 'contributing' to the processes of reproduction. The exclusively male institution of headhunting is of course a most obvious point of departure in this respect, and it is my intention in this chapter to show how this hypothesis may be confirmed through a detailed examination of the ethnographic record relating to Iban warfare and the taking of heads. Our principal concern here then, lies with the way in which the activities of Iban men as headhunters were traditionally seen as complementing the role of their womenfolk as mothers and cultivators, and how the taking of

enemy heads in war was understood to enhance the fertility of rice and to encourage the birth of future generations of Iban.

Headhunting and fertility

The association of headhunting and fertility - both human and agricultural - is a widely recognized and recurrent theme throughout Borneo. For example, St. John, in his account of headhunting in Sarawak, reports that

"of all the feasts and ceremonies, the most beneficial in its influence is the 'Head Feast'. The object of them all is to make their rice grow well, to cause the forest to abound with wild animals, to enable their dogs and snares to be successful in securing game, to have the streams swarm with fish, to give health and activity to the people themselves, and to ensure fertility to their women. All these blessings, the possessing and feasting of a fresh head are supposed to be the most efficient means of securing. The very ground itself is believed to be benefited and rendered fertile" (1862 I: 193-94).

Similarly Beccari tells us that for the people of Sarawak

"To obtain a head is for these savages the acme of glory, and the rejoicing and festivities held on such occasions are considered to be the harbingers of happiness and plenty, bringing fine weather and good crops of rice and fruits, abundance of fish and game, no less than health and fertility in women" (1904: 47)

Other examples of this kind abound in the ethnographic literature, not only of Sarawak and Borneo generally, but indeed the entire South East

Asian archipelago, and even further south in Melanesia. In almost every instance, headhunting is positively identified with the fertility of either women or crops - more often than not, both - and while the Iban are no exception to this general rule, this fact has not always been clearly established in the ethnographic literature. For example, early investigators such as Perham, Howell, Gomes or Nyauk make no mention of any connection between the taking of heads and the procurement of fertility, despite the fact that headhunting was still a current and flourishing institution at the time that they were writing. This silence is maintained by subsequent authors. Indeed one even finds one instance where such an association is actually denied for according to Morgan

"it seems clear that among the Ibans head trophies had no direct relationship to the fertility of the land. Headhunting impelled and defended the first assaults on new rich land; but the head itself did not, as among the Kayans, 'ensure prosperity and fertility' [Harrisson 1959: 41] in a new settlement" (1968: 151).

Freeman, however, has recently corrected this view and confirmed emphatically that the Iban do (or did) see headhunting as contributing to the general well-being of the community, and in particular, as instrumental in promoting the fertility of rice. Thus he writes:

"trophy heads and the rice seed (*benih padi*), on the fertility of which the welfare of the Iban principally rests, are directly equated. Indeed, the trophy head, [is]... a veritable fount of fertility - a most potent object which not only confers an undying prestige on the warrior who has procured it, but becomes, for his community, a source from which their sacred *padi* may draw an ever-continuing fecundity" (1979: 243).

In confirming this association between headhunting and the fertility of rice, Freeman gives what can only be described as a 'psychological' - even 'Freudian' - interpretation of this practice, which is based on the argument that around the world the human head is frequently seen as a phallic symbol and that the Iban themselves subscribe to this notion. He begins with an ethnographic problem, namely that trophy heads (*antu pala*) are, on occasion, ritually depicted as containing seed, and in particular, *padi pun*. This "culturally accepted fantasy" (1979: 237), he tells us, is expressed at the culmination of certain headhunting ceremonies, when the accompanying chants describe "the ritual splitting of a trophy head, or *antu pala*, by Lang Singalang Burong, the Iban god of war" (1979: 234). This particular rite is known as *ngelampang*, meaning 'to cut into pieces', and it is acted out in real life by aspiring headhunters, the only difference being that a coconut is used in place of the severed head described in the chants. Freeman writes:

"Lang achieves this feat (which symbolizes the actual beheading of an enemy) with one swift blow of his sword, and from the head which he has split open there pours forth seed which when sown grows into a human crop - as did the dragon's teeth strewn by Cadmus on the plain of Boeotia" (1979: 234).

For Freeman, then, "[a] crucial question ... for anyone wishing to understand the Iban cult of head-hunting, is, 'Why should a trophy head (of all things) contain seed?'" (Freeman 1979: 234).

Freeman's own informants were themselves unable to supply the answer to this ethnographic puzzle, and having dismissed existing theories

of headhunting on the grounds that they "totally [fail] to detect any breath of the symbolism integral to the [Iban] cult of head-hunting" (1979: 233-34), Freeman turns to a general consideration of the symbolic significance of the head among various other peoples dotted around the globe. A perusal of De Vrie's Dictionary of Symbols & Imagery (1974), leads him to remark that "the human head has been given a multiplicity of meanings, ranging from wisdom and authority to virility and fertility" (1979: 236), and given the Iban representation of the trophy head as containing seed, Freeman argues that "In the present case it is obviously with the head as a symbol of virility and fertility that we are mainly concerned" (1979: 236).

Having reached this conclusion, Freeman then turns to other examples of this same theme. In particular he draws attention to the ancient Greek belief that the psyche was present in the seed or semen which in turn was thought to be enclosed in the skull and spine in the form of a "generative marrow" (Freeman 1979: 236). Freeman writes "[t]he head and the male genitals were regarded as the principal repositories of this generative power, and so were identified, the one with the other" (1979: 236). In this respect the head was attributed with phallic properties and Freeman draws upon a number of other examples from the ancient world in order to support this equation at a more general level: the Roman conception of genius, the mitre of Osiris, the Phrygian cap of Mithras, and the phallic head of Siva (1979: 236).

Freeman then goes on to supplement this material with a selection of extracts from the literature of psychoanalysis. In particular, he points out that Freud once recorded a dream in which a hat was accorded a phallic significance (Freud 1900: 360), and he draws attention to his

comment that "in phantasies and in numerous symptoms the head too appears as a symbol of the male genitals, or, if one prefers to put it so, as something standing for them" (Freud 1916: 339). According to Freeman, this "symbolic equation Head = Phallus has since been confirmed in the writings of very many other psychoanalysts" (1979: 236), although he does not, in fact, reveal his sources here. His assertion, however, allows him to suggest that this equation "may be accepted as one of the basic symbolic identifications of many human cultures" (Freeman 1979: 236), and this claim, in turn, permits him to "consider the interpretation that the trophy heads by which the Iban set such store have a phallic significance as symbols of the generative power of nature" (1979: 237). He adds that in this respect, "a trophy head, in terms of unconscious symbolism, is another kind of 'golden bough'" (Freeman 1979: 237).

In his subsequent discussion of the Iban material, Freeman argues that "[t]he primary evidence... for a trophy head having phallic significance is the culturally accepted fantasy that such a head contains seed" (1979: 237). He adds, however, that

"Further evidence of the symbolic significance of trophy heads is contained in the metaphors [sic] used to describe them in the *timang* which is chanted during a head-hunting *gawai*. These metaphors, for the most part, refer to fertility and abundance as when trophy heads are equated with a cluster of betel nuts (*sit pinang kunchit*) or a mass of durian fruit (*tambong rian melujong*); or are implicitly phallic as when a trophy head is referred to as a pointed red pepper, a quick river fish, or a scalded, pendant cucumber (*langgu rampo betu*)" (Freeman 1979: 237)).

Freeman also points out that mythical serpents and snakes are particularly associated with Iban headhunting (1979: 240), and that there are a number

of references to animals such as the cobra, crocodile or serpent in the text of the chants (*timang*), all of which, according to Freeman, "have a significance both phallic and aggressive" (1979: 240).

It is this assortment of 'phallic' images - snakes, serpents, spears and pendant cucumbers - which when seen in conjunction with the ritual representation of heads as the containers of seed, confirm Freeman's suspicions that for the Iban, trophy heads are imbued with a significance which is at once "phallic and procreative" (1979: 243). But while it is difficult to disagree with much of what Freeman has to say in connection with the relationship between headhunting and fertility, there are, however, certain objections that might be raised, and these are to do with the very core of his argument, namely the contention that trophy heads are phallic symbols. It is not so much a case of whether or not heads have a phallic significance - almost anything can be seen as a phallic symbol, from a pencil to a clock tower - rather it is the implicit suggestion running through Freeman's argument that enemy heads are taken *because* they are phallic symbols. If this seems rather obtuse, the point that I am making is this: do the Iban take heads because of their phallic significance? Or do Iban trophy heads acquire a phallic significance because of the nature of headhunting?

Certainly it is undeniable that trophy heads are depicted as containing seed, and that in the chants, when this seed is planted, it matures into a human crop, but there is no clear evidence to suggest that these notions are linked to an idea of the trophy head as a penis. As we have seen, Freeman supports his conclusions with material that is drawn from the literature of psychoanalysis and the ethnography of the ancient world. But whereas the ancient Greeks may well have identified the head

with male genitalia on the grounds that they are both repositories of a semen-producing generative marrow wherein the psyche resides, there is nothing to suggest that the Iban subscribe to a similar set of ideas. In my opinion, then, Freeman's initial 'problem' still remains, namely the question "Why should a trophy head (of all things) contain seed?".

As far as the Iban data are concerned, all that we can be certain of is that in the rite of *ngelampang*, trophy heads are ritually depicted as containing seed and that when this seed is sown it develops into a human crop. To suggest, however, on the strength of this that heads are therefore seen as phallic symbols is an unwarranted inference, regardless of any snakes, serpents or other purportedly phallic images that may be associated with Iban headhunting. Indeed one finds that trophy heads are more commonly described as 'seed' (*igi/leka*) itself, or alternatively as 'fruit' (*buah*) (see below). Freeman himself draws attention to this imagery (see above), but in doing so he interprets these depictions as "metaphors ... [of] ... fertility and abundance". I would like to submit, however, that in the light of the recurrent plant imagery in Iban collective representations, trophy heads - as the containers of seed - are much more like the fruit with which they are so frequently compared than male genitalia. That is not to dismiss Freeman's arguments entirely, for I myself shall argue that Iban headhunting is indeed identified with virility and male sexuality. This does not, however, alter the fact that Freeman's main contention - namely that the Iban took heads because of the phallic significance that they attributed to them - around which his whole interpretation of this custom revolves, is unsubstantiated by the ethnographic data, and that a far more convincing explanation can be found

simply by working through the available material in a systematic fashion, without recourse to inferences drawn from non-Iban sources.

The interpretation of headhunting practices in anthropological theory:

Before embarking on my own interpretation of Iban headhunting, I would like first to refer, albeit briefly, to some alternative accounts of this phenomenon as found in the existing anthropological literature. Perhaps most prominent is the early, but popular, school of thought which favours the idea that heads were considered to contain "soul-substance", or "life force" - a kind of propagating agent which enhanced the fertility of everything that was brought into contact with it, be it crops, women, livestock, or whatever (A.C. Kruyt 1906; Elshout 1926; Hutton 1928, 1938). Attempts to discern the precise nature of this mystical agency have, however, been singularly unsuccessful, consistently meeting with a complete lack of response, and indeed bafflement, on the part of native informants. For Needham, this is because the theory of 'soul substance' arises out of specifically western notions of causality, bearing a closer resemblance to the investigator's own preconception about the nature of cause than it does to the statements of the people he is studying (1976). That is to say, that while indigenous explanations state quite simply that the taking of heads procured the fertility of crops, women and so forth, the mechanistic nature of Western ideas of causation demands that the ethnographer should find some form of quasi-physical medium, or agency, by which the beneficial consequences of headhunting are transmitted to their recipients. It is this inherent ethnocentrism in the approach to headhunting which, Needham argues, has led to the assumption that there

must be some kind of 'substance' contained inside the victim's head. As Needham points out, however, "[i]f the Toradja or the Kenyah or the Naga say something equivalent to $a \rightarrow b$ [i.e., that taking heads (a) procures fertility (b)], and nothing more, then there are no logical grounds to interpolate a third term [soul substance], and to do so is indeed to multiply the entities beyond necessity" (1976: 79-80; my parentheses).

Other theories have described headhunting as a form of "ritual combat", symbolizing a conflict between two antagonistic halves of a divided universe, oscillating between life and death (Downs 1955)¹; as an attempt to resolve the problem of "matter out of place" - in this instance anomalous human beings (McKinley 1976; see below); and as a function of the dichotomy between culture and nature, male and female, and life-taking and life-giving (Rosaldo & Atkinson 1975). Of these various interpretations, the latter bears the closest resemblance to my own understanding of Iban headhunting in that I too shall argue that the taking of heads is regarded by the Iban as a quintessential feature or attribute of manhood and the male gender. But Rosaldo & Atkinson's account of this association of ideas is flawed by the authors' reliance on the analytically weak dichotomy of nature and culture which, like the quasi-physical explanations of earlier investigators, is perhaps more a reflection of our own assumptions about the way things are in the world, than it is a product of an indigenous ideology.

To summarize, previous attempts to account for the phenomenon of headhunting are linked by a common weakness, namely a tendency to rely upon pre-existing assumptions of one kind or another, be it an ethnocentric view of causality, or a theoretical position such as the analytical concepts of dualism, matter out of place, the dichotomy between

nature and culture, or even Freudian psychoanalysis. I have tried, therefore, in my own analysis of Iban headhunting to let, as far as possible, the ethnography speak for itself, while resisting the temptation to force a conclusion through the importation of theoretical assumptions that have been arrived at elsewhere. That is to say, the attention here is focused primarily upon what the Iban themselves have to say about headhunting and the manner in which it is depicted in Iban oral literature and ritual procedure, rather than the observations and comments of others, which are only considered in as far as they can be directly related to the statements of informants.

The representation of trophy heads as fruit

The underlying theme which has linked the foregoing chapters of this thesis has been the recurrent use of plant imagery in Iban social and religious ideology. It seems appropriate, therefore, to begin by considering the frequent representation of trophy heads as fruit (*buah*, or else *leka origi*)². This idea appears again and again in Iban oral literature, and may be found in the context of festival chants, ritual invocations, funeral dirges, and even love songs. A wide range of images may be employed in this connection; for example, trophy heads may be referred to as a cluster of betel nuts (Georgie 1959: 22; Freeman 1979: 237), a mass of durian fruit (Freeman 1979: 237), the fruit of the *nibong* palm (*Oncosperma tigillaria*) (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 116), a bunch of coconuts (Sandin 1977: 46; 105-108), or even red peppers and cucumbers (Freeman 1979: 237). A particularly common image, however, is that of *igi*

ranyai - the fruit of the *ranyai* palm (Sandin 1961: 186; 1966: 68; 1977: 78-91).

The *ranyai* palm does not in fact exist as such, but instead is a mythical *nibong* palm (see above) which is said to grow in the land of the dead (Howell & Bailey 1900: 137; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 116; Richards 1981: 299). For example, in the *sabak* funeral dirge, the party of the dead who come to escort the newly deceased to the Iban afterworld are described as coming upon a most beautiful place as they approach Sebayau along the river Mandai (Sandin 1966: 64-69). This place, known as Madang Ranyai, is a wonderful grove where the mythical *nibong* palm - the *ranyai* - grows in great profusion. Here the party halts, whereupon the women members urge their menfolk to drive away the wasps that swarm around the trunks of these trees and to cut down their fruit - the *buah ranyai* - for them (Sandin 1966: 68). This request has an immediate effect on the men who leap up ...

"shouting excitedly like the *pangkas* omen bird,
With their swords girded on their waists; whose hilts were
quickly decorated with hair, and handsomely blowing in the wind.
They slashed off the tops of the *nibong* palms
And cut away the fruits of the *ranyai*;
Which sounded loudly like the noise of a busy bazaar"
(Sandin 1966: 68).

These fruit then fall to the ground and as they do so they metamorphize into human heads (begumba Balang Bedai)³, which are hastily gathered up by the women⁴.

This sequence is of course an allegorical account of headhunting in which the pollarding of the *ranyai* palms and the cutting down of their

fruit refers, metaphorically, to the mortal wounding of an enemy and the subsequent removal of his head. In this light the reference to swarming wasps can be understood as signifying a fusilade of enemy bullets, while the cries of a noisy bazaar describe the tumult and confusion of battle. The mention of Pangkas is also significant in this context for he is one of the warrior sons-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong who in his earthly manifestation as an omen-bird takes on the form of a maroon woodpecker (*Blythipicus rubiginosis*); the cry of this bird is said to be 'like a man shouting in triumph', and because of this his call is always welcomed by war parties for it tells of the traditional shouts of victory that accompanied the return of a successful expedition (Freeman 1961: 152).

The slashing of palm trees of one species or another - *ranyai*, *nanga*, *nibong*, *pinang* or whatever - is in fact a very common device for the representation of headhunting in Iban oral literature (Ling Roth 1896 I: 119; Georgie 1959: 22; Harriison 1965: 17, 31, 34, 41). For example, an almost identical sequence to the one described above can be found in the chants that accompany the *gawai antu* festival, when the dead return to be commemorated by their surviving relatives (Sandin 1961: 186), while similar themes can also be discerned in the ritual imagery of many, if not all, Iban headhunting ceremonies (below). This last point has not been clearly made before in the ethnographic literature. I shall argue here, however, that the representation of head trophies as the fruit of palm, coconut, or some other species of fructiferous tree, is in fact central to the understanding of headhunting as a ritual activity, and furthermore, that the portrayal of decapitation as the gathering of this strange fruit-crop is an essential element in a series of images and ritual associations, which together support the Iban assertion that the taking of heads brings

about the fertility of both rice and women. Accordingly, it is to the ritual imagery of Iban headhunting ceremonies, and the chants that accompany them, that I would now like to turn.

Headhunting *gawai* and the ritual gathering of the fruit of the *Ranyai*

As I have mentioned, all major Iban festivals (*gawai*) are alike in that their central concern is the invitation of the gods to a feast which is to be held in their honour. In the case of headhunting festivals, which are distinguished by the title *gawai amat*, or 'true festival', the key deity is of course Lang Sengalang Burong, the Iban god of war, and he is accompanied by his wife and daughters, together with their husbands who are at the same time the major omen-birds of Iban augury. As with other *gawai*, the main feature of Iban headhunting festivals is the performance of lengthy chants and invocations (*pengap* and *timang*), which are sung on the eve of the feast by professional bards (*lemembang*), and which culminate at dawn the following day with the enactment of some kind of ritual ceremony such as the rite of *ngelampang* described by Freeman (see above). These chants are for the most part concerned with sending the invitation to the house of Lang, and his subsequent journey to the world of men to attend the festival that is being held in his honour. In this respect they concur with other festival chants, but a key dramatic element in the case of the verses that are sung at headhunting *gawai*, is a sequence that occurs approximately half-way through the song-cycle, in which the gods themselves are described as setting out on a headhunting expedition. This raid is directed against a powerful and malevolent demon, known variously as Nising, Bedurok or Bengkong, who is described as living

at the 'edge of the sky' (*tisi langit* - ie, on the horizon) (Perham 1878: 130-132; Sandin 1977: 77 seq; Freeman 1979: 240).

The war-party is made up by the sons-in-law of Lang, and is primarily mounted on account of Endu Dara Tinchin Temaga, his youngest daughter, who refuses to go to the festival without first having something to bring with her as a gift for her hosts (Perham 1878: 130; Sandin 1977: 69, 71; Freeman 1979: 240). This gift, or "precious ornament" (Perham 1878: 130), is of course nothing other than a freshly-taken head:

"Enti isang lama enggi kitai dia aku enggai mai,
Ke bereba di pala tiang,
Enti rangkah pala aku enggai mai,
Enggai enda mai ka baru agi chinang.

I do not want to bring with me old *isang*^s leaves,
Which uselessly crowd the top of the post.
I do not want to bring the ancient skull,
I must bring a new one which is still dripping with blood"
(Sandin 1977: 69, 71)

The raid itself is described at length, and it is important to note here that the head which is sought, is hardly ever referred to directly as such - i.e. by the term *antu pala* or one of the titles by which head trophies are more commonly known such as Balang Begumba or Balang Begundai (see p. 403 n.3). Instead one finds that as the omen-birds traverse the various territories, or *menoa* of the Iban mythical universe, they ask of their inhabitants if they have seen the precious fruit of the *ranyai* palm (*igi ranyai*) (Perham 1878: 131; Sandin 1977: 78-91). In other words, one finds that in the context of an Iban headhunting festival or *gawai*, the portrayal of trophy heads as fruit, and in particular as the

fruit of the *ranyai* palm, is not an arbitrary or occasional theme, but rather one that is repeatedly and most emphatically stated.

Time and time again the omen-birds find that the answer to their inquiries is 'No', but eventually they come to the land of the spirit Rintong Langit Pengulor Bulan (The Sky [where] the Moon Hangs [like] a Rintong Basket), who tells them that the object of their desires lies in the house of the demon Nising (or Bedurok, or Bengkong), who lives at the edge of the yellow and red sky - i.e. on the horizon where the sun sets (or rises) (Sandin 1977: 90-91; Freeman 1979: 240). On hearing this news the omen-birds become tremendously excited and they prepare themselves for war. That night as they sleep in their encampment, their dreams are full of strange images in which they see themselves cutting down great bunches of coconuts, or else being ceremonially greeted by beautiful maidens with flowers in their hair (Sandin 1977: 105-8). These visions are interpreted by Lang as foretelling their success in taking heads, and on the next day the omen-birds eagerly embark upon the final steps to acquire the prize of which they have dreamed.

Somewhat curiously there is no specific account of combat as such, although the actual preparations for war are described in detail (Sandin 1977: 108-111). Instead the encounter with Nising is portrayed more as a battle of wits than a military conquest, and begins with the omen-birds creeping up on the longhouse of Nising to take him unawares so that he has no opportunity to resist them (Sandin 1977: 108-9, 111). With the demon thus placed at a disadvantage, the omen-birds then proceed to lull him into a sense of false security, flattering him with their words and mock praises. In doing so, they encourage him to drink himself into insensibility through the consumption of large quantities of palm wine

(*arak*) (Perham 1978: 131; Sandin 1977: 109, 111-12). This Nising gulps down with a great roaring noise, like the sound of a forest fire, and, then, as he falls to the floor in a drunken stupor, the omen-birds leap forward and strike off his head (Sandin 1977: 109-10, 112-15).

Interestingly, the chants repeatedly mention how the omen-birds are assisted in their fell deed, by various magical charms, and indeed the *igi ranyai* is itself referred to here as an *engkeramba'*, or wooden effigy in human form (Sandin 1977: 109, 113), which is normally placed at the entrance of a longhouse to ward off misfortune (Richards 1981: 84). In the chants it is described as emerging from beneath the hat or turban of Nising as he collapses on the floor⁶, and it would seem that it is the loss of this magical protection which enable the omen-birds to remove his head. In other words, headhunting is in this context portrayed as a magical contest whose outcome depends upon the efficacy of the charms that are carried by every hunter when on the warpath. These may be worn in an armband on the left bicep, on a cord around the waist, attached to the scabbard, or slung under the left arm from a strap over the right shoulder (Richards 1981: 270), and they may often have been obtained in an encounter with a benevolent *antu* (see pp. 101-102). In this particular instance they have ensured the safety of the omen-birds, and assisted their defeat of the demon Nising.

With their prize secured, the omen-birds beat a hasty retreat, returning in triumph to the longhouse of their father-in-law, Lang. Here the precious *igi ranyai* is ceremoniously received by his wife, Indai Kachendai, who wraps it in one of her finest blankets and parades it up and down the verandah, singing its praises (Sandin 1977: 114-16). In this

way the request of Endu Dara Tinchin Temaga is fulfilled and the household of Lang is enabled to set off for the festival that is being held.

To summarize briefly, in dramatic accounts of the headhunting expedition of the gods - which form a key sequence in the chants that accompany all major Iban headhunting festivals - one finds that trophy heads are repeatedly depicted as fruit of one sort or another, and in particular, as the fruit of the mythical *ranyai* palm. This theme is very clearly expressed in the text of these festival chants, but curiously the ethnographic literature provides no explanation of this imagery. The closest one comes to a discussion of these associations of ideas is when Freeman describes them as "metaphors ..[of] ... fertility and abundance" (above). In many respects this is precisely what they are, but I shall argue below that this imagery has a far greater significance than simply that of a 'poetic' device referring to the anticipated consequences of taking heads; rather it plays a crucial role in the logic of headhunting as a ritual activity which can only be properly understood in terms of this association of ideas.

The most important point to realize here is that the collective representation of headhunting as the gathering of fruit can in fact be discerned not only in the imagery of the chants that are performed at major headhunting festivals, or *gawai amat* (above), but also in the actual ritual procedures that take place on such occasions. This theme is especially evident in Sandin's account of the *gawai burong*, or bird festival, where one finds that much of the ritual attention is focussed upon the erection of a ceremonial pole, or column, on the verandah (*tanju*) of the longhouse (Sandin 1977: 53 ff.). No explanation is given of the significance of this ritual edifice - which is known as *tiang kelingkang*

(*tiang*=a pole; *kelingkang*=a place or receptacle for offerings) - but I shall argue below that this ceremonial column can in fact be understood as nothing other than a material representation of the mystical *ranyai* tree. In this light it is then possible to see many of the activities taking place in conjunction with the *tiang kelingkang* as being in effect dramatic re-enactments of the headhunting exploits of the omen-birds, as described, nightly, in the accompanying festival chant.

The ritual significance of the *Tiang Kelingkang*

Sandin tells us that on the eve of *gawai burung* festivals, the *tiang kelingkang* is decorated with coloured cottons (*nali kelingkang*) by leading women weavers ⁷ and 'consecrated' with the blood of a sacrificed pig (1977: 53). The pole is then ceremoniously raised on the verandah of the longhouse, and once in position is surrounded by *sabang* plants (*Cordyeline* spp.). With these preparations completed, the festival hosts and their guests gather round and while the most senior and respected members of the community are allocated "places of honour" along the verandah rail, those who are warriors are seated at the foot of the *tiang kelingkang* (Sandin 1977: 53; see also Basil 1949: 59).

When everyone is in place, the ceremonies begin with the praise of the community's head trophies. These, together with any that may have been brought along by their guests, are reverently carried out onto the verandah by the officiating bards, or *lemembang*, and are then paraded up and down the length of the longhouse to the accompaniment of laudatory verses in their honour (*nimang antu pala*) (Sandin 1977: 53 seq.). These praise songs again employ the labels *igi* and *leka* as a prefix for trophy

heads, and although these terms are most usually followed by some title such as Balang Begumba, or Balang Begundai (see p. 341), it is important to note that the heads are twice described as "the young fruit of the coconut palm" (*telinsu langgu nyuir*) (Sandin 1977: 46), while in three other instances they are actually spoken of as *igi ranyai* (Sandin 1977: 48, 59)²⁸. What is more, one finds that the *nimang antu pala* verses refer to the festival that is being celebrated as the *gawai ranyai ensebam*, or 'festival of the luxuriant *ranyai* palm' (Sandin 1977: 53-54), while elsewhere in the chants, the column itself is actually described as the *tiang ranyai*, or alternatively, as the *ranyai tiang kelingkang* (Sandin 1977: 48, 70; see also p. 404 n8). In other words, the ethnographic evidence strongly suggests that the *tiang kelingkang* is regarded by the Iban as a material representation of the mythical *ranyai* palm that grows in Sebayau.

In support of this argument one should note that Endu Dara Tinchin Temaga, in her request for a freshly taken trophy head, remarks that she does not want to turn up at the celebrations with "old *isang* leaves which uselessly crowd the top of the post" (*'Enti isang lama enggi kitai dia aku enggai mai, ke kereba pala tiang'*). The *isang* is another species of jungle palm (unidentified) and its leaves are frequently used in a ritual context to denote the success of a headhunting raid (Richards 1981: 118). For example, they may be lashed to the bows of a returning war canoe, or else adorn the spears of those who have taken heads. In this instance, however, it would appear that *isang* leaves may also be attached to the top of the *tiang kelingkang*, thus giving it the semblance of a growing palm or a tree.

One should also note in this connection that while senior members of the community and their guests are situated in places of honour along the outer edge of the longhouse verandah, still active warriors are actually seated at the foot of the *tiang kelingkang* (above). This separation of warriors from the rest of the congregation can, on the one hand, be seen simply as a spatial reflection of their special status within Iban society. On the other hand, the fact that they are specifically placed at the foot of the *tiang kelingkang* again suggests that *tiang kelingkang* may be identified as representative of the mythical *ranyai* palm whose 'fruits' Iban warriors are said to gather.

As far as the actual rites themselves are concerned, one finds that once the head trophies have been paraded up and down the length of the longhouse they are then laid to rest at the foot⁹ of the *tiang kelingkang* and offerings are placed with them (Sandin 1977: 55-56). A lengthy prayer (*sampi*) is recited to invoke the presence of Lang Sengalang Burong and this is immediately followed by a war dance (*rayah*), which is performed by the warriors around the *tiang kelingkang* to a rhythm beaten out on *ketebong* drums (Sandin 1977: 56)¹⁰. The dance beat (*gedang rayah*) is alternated with a second rhythm (*gedang pampat/pepat*), which like the prayer, is also designed to summon Lang from his sky realm Langit, and the dramatic tension steadily rises until the bards announce that Lang has come among them¹¹. With this climax reached, the atmosphere then relaxes, and large quantities of rice wine (*tuak*) are consumed in a festive spirit (Sandin 1977: 56).

The important point to note in connection with these ritual procedures is that a performance of the *berayah* war dance may be "described poetically as *semah berayah kaki rantau, napat-ka rarah buah*

jambu, the *semah* fish leaps at the foot of the reach and goes for the *jambu* fruits that fall (i.e. heads)" (Richards 1981: 43). That is to say, the 'poetic' description of the war dance in Iban oral literature itself evokes images of fallen fruit, and the fact that on the occasion of the *gawai burong* festival it is performed around the base of the *tiang kelingkang* again suggests that this ceremonial column should be interpreted as representative of the mythical *ranyai* palm, and that the heads which are placed at its foot should be seen as its (fallen) fruit. In this respect one should therefore note that this mystical tree is sometimes referred to by the alternative title of *nibong berayah* (Richards 1981: 235; my emphasis).

At this point I would like to look beyond the *gawai burong* festival and consider some other headhunting ceremonies in which similar themes appear. To begin with, however, one should note that the *gawai burong* in fact refers to a cycle of festivals arranged in nine ascending stages, the penultimate of which is actually known by the title of *gawai ranyai* (Sandin 1977: 13; 1980: 42). Howell has also mentioned a festival of this title which he describes as "the greatest of all feasts" (1977: 140). He writes:

"At this feast all the heads are collected and placed in a winnowing basket or *chapan* and spears are hung round it suspended by means of cords. A distinguished warrior in full fighting dress sits beneath the suspended spears and another man of war cuts away the cord by which they are hanging" (1977: 140; see also 1977: 93).

On this occasion Howell does not actually mention that this ritual assembly of spears and heads should be seen as a representation of the

mythical *ranyai* palm, but elsewhere he specifically tells us that "during a great head feast (*gawai ranyai*), spears are put in an upright position in imitation of this so-called *ranyai* [i.e. the mythical *nibong* palm] and the bravest warrior present is invited to fell them" (Howell & Bailey 1900: 137). In other words, the cutting down of the suspended spears can be understood in this context as the ritual enactment of the slashing of *ranyai* palms, and the suggestion here of course is that this action can be simultaneously identified with combat and the taking of enemy heads in war as they are allegorically portrayed in the Iban oral literature. In this respect, then, Howell's description of the *gawai ranyai* may be seen to support my earlier arguments regarding the significance of the *tiang kelingkang* and the ritual interpretation of the *berayah* 'war dance' that is performed around its base.

The association of headhunting with the gathering of palm fruit can also be found in connection with other Iban headhunting festivals, or more precisely, in the imagery of the titles by which they are known, for the ethnographic data available for each *gawai*, as a distinct set of rites and so forth, are regrettably somewhat limited. For example, Howell, Freeman, Sandin and Richards have all referred to a festival by the name of *gawai ijok pumpong* (or *ijau pumpong*) (Howell 1977: 91, 140; Sandin 1967: 45; Freeman 1975: 280; Richards 1981: 97, 113). The term *ijok* describes yet another species of jungle palm (*Arenga pinnata*), while the verb *pumpong* means 'to cut the top off, to behead' (Richards 1981: 290). Thus one finds that the title of this festival, as Sandin himself observes, "means, literally, 'a beheaded palm tree'" (1967a: 45). In this respect we are provided with a further instance in which the imagery of slashing palm trees is found in conjunction with Iban headhunting ceremonies, and it is

important to realize in this connection that the *gawai ijok pumpong* is in fact the fifth in the nine stages that go to make up a complete *gawai burong* cycle (Sandin 1967a: 45; see above), for this again supports my earlier conclusions as regards the ritual significance of the *tiang kelingkang* pole and the *berayah* war dance¹².

While still on the subject of festival titles, Sandin tells us that the *gawai ranyai* - which, it will be recalled, is the eighth stage in the cycle of *gawai burong* festivals - may alternatively be known as *gawai mudur ruroh* (1977: 13). What is of interest to us here is that the term *mudur* again denotes a type of palm tree (*Salacca* spp.), while *ruroh* means 'to fall, shed, or cause to drop', as in "*Sida' ngerurohka buah*", 'they are gathering (knocking down) fruit' (Richards 1981: 314). In other words, it would appear from this title that the underlying theme of this festival corresponds very closely to that of the *gawai ijok pumpong* discussed above. What is more, one learns that on such occasions "the sacred pole [i.e. *tiang kelingkang*] is made of a bunch of spears which have been used in fighting against the enemy in various wars" (Sandin 1980: 42) (c.f. Howell's description of the *gawai ranyai* above).

Other festivals in the *gawai burong* series include the *gawai mulong merangau* (lit. 'the festival of the weeping sago palm' [Richards 1981: 216, 222-23, 298]), where the "sacred pole which is made from durian wood, and is cleverly carved like an old sago palm tree when all its fruit has fallen to the ground" (Sandin 1980: 41); and the *gawai gajah meram*, or 'broody elephant festival', where "the pole ... is made of a strong wood with branches decorated with skulls and *isang* palm leaves" (Sandin 1980: 42). In both instances one encounters a ritual association of palm trees

- the *isang* palm, no less, in the latter example (see above) - and fallen fruit or head trophies, whose juxtaposition here would again appear to support my view of the principle theme at Iban headhunting festivals - namely that of a ceremonial re-enactment of the taking of heads, portrayed for the occasion as the gathering of palm fruit.

Briefly then, one finds that major Iban headhunting ceremonies - *gawai amat* - consistently involve, or turn upon, an extended set of references to jungle palms of one species or another, which may occur, either in the titles that are bestowed upon them, or else, in the imagery of the chants accompanying them. Curiously, however, the ethnographic literature offers no explanation or discussion of this imagery despite the fact that the portrayal of headhunting as the cutting down of palm fruit is a widely recognized motif in Iban oral literature. Quite why this is so is somewhat puzzling, but it seems likely that it is this indifference to the imagery of palm trees which explains the apparent failure of past investigators to grasp the significance of the *tiang kelingkang* as a ritual structure and the crucial importance of the collective representation of trophy heads as (palm) fruit.

Returning for a moment to the *tiang kelingkang*, there are one or two further points that are worth mentioning in connection with this ritual device. To begin with, one finds that although Sandin's description of the *gawai burong* ceremonies makes no reference to any ritual comparable to Howell's account of the 'felling' of *ranyai* palms (see above), it does, however, provide some interesting details as regards the subsequent fate of the *sabang* plants that surround the base of the *tiang kelingkang*. That is to say, one finds that when this edifice is dismantled - some seven days after the conclusion of the festival - the *sabang* plants are

preserved and replanted near the longhouse "as a mark of respect to commemorate the festival just completed" (Sandin 1977: 179). This is of course very reminiscent of the longevity rites described in chapter IV, where the *sabang* plants surrounding the patient's *pun ayu* are similarly removed and planted outside the longhouse following the conclusion of the ceremonies. In that particular instance, the subsequent health and well-being of the individual concerned is said to correspond - for a time, at any rate - with the state of growth of these replanted *sabang*, and it seems likely the significance of the *sabang* plants that are employed at *gawai burong* festivals may also be endowed with a significance that extends beyond simply that of a 'commemorative' device.

To elaborate, procedural similarities between the use of *sabang* plants in Iban rites to procure longevity and their employment in connection with a headhunting festival suggests that there may be further correspondences in as far as their ritual significance in both contexts is concerned. In the case of longevity rituals, the future health and well-being of the patient is identified with the subsequent growth of the *sabang* plants that surround the *pun ayu* (pp. 187-188), and it seems likely that a similar significance may be attached to the *sabang* plants that are placed around the *tiang kelingkang* at a *gawai burong* festival. By this I mean that if the *tiang kelingkang* can be understood as a representation of the mythical *ranyai* palm, then it may be possible to draw a parallel between the subsequent growth of the *sabang* plants that are incorporated into this ritual structure and the health of these fabulous palm trees. In other words, if the replanted *sabang* flourish, then so do the Iban people, for the fertility of their rice crop, on which the livelihood of all depends, demands that Iban men should periodically gather the 'fruit' (i.e.

heads) of their mythical counterpart - i.e. the *ranyai* palms of Sebayan. If, on the other hand, these plants wither and die, then this is taken as an ominous sign, and the life and well-being of the whole community is placed in jeopardy, for the implication in this instance is that all is not well with the palm groves of Madang Ranyai.

The suggestion here is that the future success and well-being of Iban society can be linked to the imagined fruitfulness of the mythical *ranyai* palm whose health, for a time at least, is seen to be reflected in the state of growth of the *sabang* plants that are planted outside the longhouse at the conclusion of a *gawai burong* festival. In this respect one can draw a parallel between the ritual significance of the *sabang* plants that are featured in Iban rites to procure longevity, and those that are employed in the context of a *gawai burong* ceremony for in both instances the future health and well-being of man is ritually identified with the subsequent growth of these plants. But whereas in the case of longevity rites we are concerned only with individuals, in the case of the *gawai burong* festival it is the future of society as a whole which is at stake. It must be emphasized, though, that this apparent congruity between the two sets of ritual procedures cannot be confirmed without further ethnographic evidence. For the moment, then, this suggestion must remain simply as an interesting possibility.

Moving on from the *tiang kelingkang* to a consideration of other possible portrayals of the mythical *ranyai* tree in Iban ritual imagery, it is important to note that the term *ranyai* may sometimes appear in the ethnographic literature as an alternative title for a *pandong*, or temporary 'shrine', erected at major festivals and other important ceremonial

occasions. Freeman, for example, in his description of the ritual procedures at a Baleh Iban headhunting *gawai*, tells us that

"The most important rite after the arrival of the guests (made up as far as possible of men renowned for their prowess as head-hunters) is the setting up of shrines, or *ranyai*, on the *ruai*, or public gallery of the long-house - one for each of the participating families. A shrine consists of a bamboo framework over which *ikat* fabrics (which commonly depict the feats of head-hunters) are draped. On the outer surface of the shrine are hung swords, and various ritual objects with phallic connotations¹³. Under Iban custom it should be set up by a man who has himself taken a head" (1979: 239).

Freeman adds that "[o]nce erected, a shrine becomes the centre-piece for the rites that follow and, in particular, it becomes the abode, during the course of the *gawai*, of Lang Singalang Burong" (1979: 239).

Nyuak also provides a detailed account of the construction of a *ranyai* shrine in his description of the "feast of altars" or *gawai kelingkang* (1977: 215-218). The term *kelingkang* refers to "yellow bamboos... split into thin laths, which are [then] loosely woven together" (Nyuak 1977: 216). These are often used in rituals as a tray on which offerings may be placed (Richards 1981: 151), but at a *gawai kelingkang* they form an integral part of the *ranyai* structure. Thus Nyuak writes:

"An important man of the tribe is ... chosen to construct the *ranyai*. Having dressed himself in a long robe and girded on his sword from the hilt of which wave tresses of human hair, he takes in one hand a bunch of *isang* (yellow fronds of the areca palm, *Areca catechu*) and after going through several passes of the war dance, places one of the *kelingkangs* in the centre of the *ruai* [gallery], the other he hangs up over the first from a rafter above. Round these he erects four upright poles, surrounding these again with a fencing of lathwork. All the swords of the family (or families who are the chief holders of the feast) with large bundles of charms attached,

are then placed within the fence, also the heads of enemies of the tribe. The whole is then covered with native blankets" (1977: 216)

Evidently both Freeman and Nyuak are describing the same structure, and it is clear that Howell is in fact referring to a very similar assembly in his description of the *gawai ranyai* festival (see above). But whereas the latter is explicitly identified with the mythical *ranyai* palms that grow in Sebayon (Howell & Bailey 1900: 137), neither Nyuak or Freeman make any suggestion that the ritual apparatus of which they write, should be seen in this light, despite the fact that both authors refer to this "shrine" by the term *ranyai*. Furthermore, although both Freeman and Nyuak refer to the erection of a *ranyai* shrine in the context of a headhunting festival, neither author actually suggests that such a construction is *only* to be found in conjunction with headhunting ceremonies¹⁴. In fact one finds that Freeman describes the *ranyai* elsewhere simply as "a frame of rotan and wood, covered with *ikat* fabrics ...[which]... [among the Baleh Iban ... is the abode of the gods for the duration of a *gawai* (1975: 281), which would appear to imply that the *ranyai* shrine may be erected at any major ritual occasion to which the gods are summoned. Similarly, Richards, in his dictionary, states merely that the *ranyai* is a "shrine erected at major festivals" in the Ulu Ai and Ulu Rejang (1981: 299), without making any distinction between headhunting *gawai* and other categories of festival.

In this light, then, it would appear that in some areas at least, the term *ranyai* is simply an alternative title for a *pandong*, which is described by Richards as being an almost identical structure, consisting of a frame of cane or bamboos that extends from the floor to the rafters

of the gallery, and which is similarly hung with blankets, charms and offerings (1981: 248). That is to say, an explicit identification of the *ranyai* shrine with the mythical *nibong* palms of Sebayan would seem either to be absent, or else to have escaped the attention of past investigators. It might be, however, that although this association was once recognized by previous generations, it has, in recent times, become 'lost', following the government prohibition of headhunting and the corresponding decline of this activity as a central feature of the Iban way of life. In this last respect it is interesting to note that spears may be added to the *pandong* on the occasion of a headhunting *gawai*, and also that it may be 'decorated' with *sabang* plants although we are not told what sort of ceremonies demand the latter elaboration (Richards 1981: 248). But it is unwise to draw too many conclusions from this material without further ethnographic evidence, and so for the moment our understanding of the ritual significance of both *ranyai* and *pandong* must remain somewhat vague. What we can be certain of, however, is that in Howell's account of the *gawai ranyai* "head feast", the spears that are suspended in an upright position from the rafters of the longhouse are quite explicitly identified with the mythical *ranyai* palm that grows in Sebayan¹⁵. In this respect the very use of the term *ranyai* to describe the ritual apparatus erected at other Iban headhunting ceremonies (Nyuak 1977: 216; Freeman 1979: 239) automatically raises the possibility that this interpretation is valid elsewhere¹⁶.

Before leaving the subject of the ritual devices that are found in conjunction with headhunting *gawai*, there is one further structure that I would like to consider, and that is the *kelekuyang*. Nyuak tells us that on the return of a successful headhunting expedition, a *kelekuyang* must be

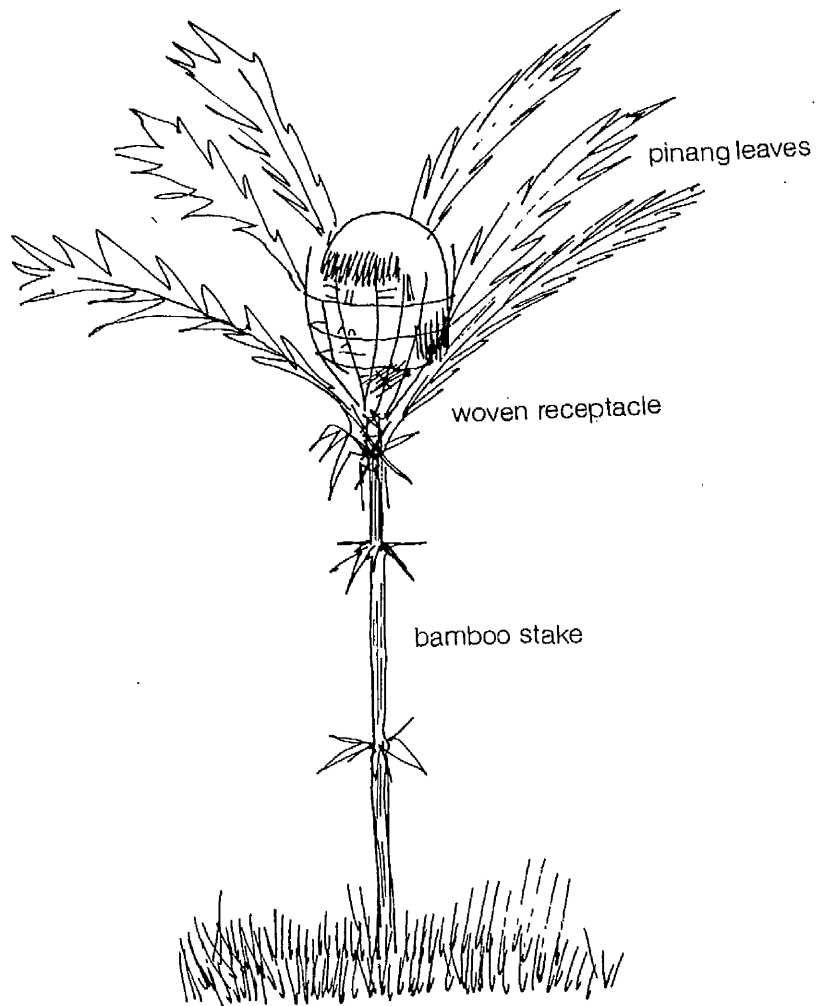
made for each newly-taken head before it can be ceremonially received into the longhouse. He describes a *kelekuyang* as

"a piece of bamboo some five feet long, the split end of which is spread out and woven so as to form a receptacle in which the trophy head is placed, and decorated with the young yellow leaves of the areca palm" (1977: 202).

These are then "planted" at the foot of the longhouse steps, prior to the ceremonial welcome of the newly taken heads into the building (Nyauak 1977: 202; Richards 1981: 149). Unfortunately, there are no photographs or illustrations of this device. Nevertheless it is not too fanciful to suggest that the *kelekuyang* may, like the *tiang kelingkang*, have an arboreal significance, and that it can thus be understood as a material representation of the image of heads as palm fruit. By this I mean that the trophy head is placed on the end of a stake (rather as a golf ball is placed on a tee), which is 'decorated' with palm leaves and then 'planted' in the ground, thus creating a structure with a general appearance that must, to a greater or lesser extent, resemble my imaginative reconstruction below. The suggestion here is that in the light of the frequent portrayal of headhunting as the pollarding of palm trees and the gathering of their fruit, the bamboo stake of the *kelekuyang* can be interpreted as representing the trunk of one such palm tree, the leaves, its foliage, and the head at the top, its fruit.

Figure 5

Reconstruction of a *kelekuyang* for the reception of
newly taken trophy heads



Richards provides a very similar description of *kelekuyang*, but mentions that *isang* leaves may be used instead of those of the Areca palm (*pinang*) (1981: 149). As I mentioned earlier, the *isang* is yet another species of palm tree (unidentified) which is regularly featured in

connection with headhunting (Howell & Bailey 1900: 61; Nyuak 1977: 216-17; Harrison 1965: 13, 25; Freeman 1979: 238). What is particularly interesting in this instance, however, is that the *ranyai* palms which grow in Sebayan are described in a transcription of a *sabak* funeral dirge as bearing *isang* leaves (Sandin 1966: 59, 65-66) - in other words, just as one finds that *isang* leaves are used to adorn the *kelekuyang*. This again suggests that the *kelekuyang* stake can be seen in an arboreal light, and that in particular it can be identified with the mythical *ranyai* palms of Sebayan.

Obviously this interpretation must remain somewhat tentative, especially in the absence of any pictorial record. Nevertheless it is interesting to note that the same structure is known in the Rejang region as *sempuyong bunga* - or 'flowering *empuyong* basket' (Richards 1981: 337), and that Freeman refers to a headhunting festival by the title of *gawai teresang mansau* (1975: 280), where *teresang* is an alternative term for the woven receptacle or head basket, but *mansau* means ripe (lit. 'red'). In both instances one finds that the receptacle for the newly-taken heads is associated with some form of vegetable process - a flowering, on the one hand, a ripening, on the other - which would again tend to support my suggestion that the *kelekuyang* should be seen as a palm tree (in bloom), with the trophy head as its (ripened) fruit¹⁷.

But how are we to understand this imagery? Why should heads be depicted as fruit and how does this relate to other aspects of Iban headhunting? It is in order to pursue these lines of inquiry that I would now like to return to Freeman's account of the rite of *ngelempang* and the idea that the trophy head contains seed.

The rite of *Ngelempang*

Freeman tells us that the rite of *ngelempang* comes at the climax of headhunting ceremonies in the Baleh region (1979: 234), and takes place on the morning after the night of chants which tell of the war party of the omen-birds and the journey of Lang Sengalang Burong and his entourage to the longhouse of men (1979: 239-41). The term *ngelempang*, as we noted earlier, means 'to cut into pieces' (Freeman 1979: 234), and it will be recalled that the ritual attention on such occasions is focused on the splitting open of a head trophy (represented in this instance by a coconut) to release all kinds of seed but most importantly that of "sacred rice" (*padi pun*).

The head that receives this treatment is identified with the one that is brought by Lang and his followers, which was, of course, originally obtained from the longhouse of Bengkong (Nising) by the omen-birds (see above). Indeed in the narrative of the accompanying chants it is Lang who is described as actually carrying out what is in effect a ritual re-enactment of the decapitation. Freeman writes:

"This splitting open of the head is explicitly symbolic of the act of beheading an enemy. At the same time as Lang's actions are being described in the invocation, they are ritually acted out by the men for whom the *gawai* is being held. However, instead of splitting open an actual trophy head, each aspirant attempts to split open with one blow a husked coconut, around the centre of which a red thread has been tied. Here again, the splitting of the coconut is symbolic of the beheading of an enemy, and the success of an aspirant in performing this rite is taken as a measure of his future prowess as a head-hunter" (1979: 242-3).

Freeman goes on to tell us that

"The head split open by Lang contains all manner of seed, and, most prominently, the seed of the sacred rice (*padi pun*) of the Iban. This precious seed, says Lang, is to be planted" (1979: 243).

It is this collective representation, this "culturally accepted fantasy that such a head contains seed" (Freeman 1979: 237), which prompts Freeman to suggest that Iban head trophies are imbued with a phallic significance. Part of his argument rests on the fact that the seed, when planted, gives rise to a human crop (1979: 234, 244), which enables him to infer that the seed is equated with semen and hence heads with penises. But despite the superficial plausibility of this argument Freeman is unable to provide us with any concrete evidence to suggest that the Iban themselves regard the heads of their enemies in this light. On the other hand, one does find that trophy heads are consistently and repeatedly described as fruit of one sort or another, and in particular as the fruit of various species of palm including the mythical *ranyai* palm. The prevalence and predominance of this imagery in the collective representation of trophy heads makes it far more likely, I suggest, that it is *this* theme - rather than one of phallic procreation - which is alluded to in the context of the rite of *ngelempang*. By this I mean that the ritual imagery of this ceremony suggests, very strongly, that on such occasions, trophy heads - as the containers of seed - should be regarded, not as penises, as Freeman would appear to argue, but rather as the seed-bearing fruit with which they are so often identified elsewhere in Iban collective representations. In this light the use of a coconut in place of

a trophy head can be seen to have a two-fold significance, for although, on the one hand its shape and texture makes it a good surrogate for the head of an enemy, on the other, as the fruit and seed of the coconut palm it is the perfect material representation of the metaphorical portrayal of headhunting as the gathering of palm fruit.

In summary, then, one finds that trophy heads are regularly depicted in Iban oral literature as fruit of one sort or another, and in particular as the fruit of the mythical *ranyai* palm that grows in Sebeyan. At the same time, headhunting is typically portrayed as the cutting down of this strange fruit, and similar themes, I have argued, can also be discerned in the ritual imagery of major Iban headhunting ceremonies such as the *gawai burong* festival and the rite of *ngelempang* described above. In the latter instance the trophy head - represented by a coconut - is split open to release all kinds of seed and most importantly the seed of *padi pun*, or "sacred rice". It is to the subsequent fate of this seed, that I now turn.

Headhunting and the agricultural cycle

When the trophy head has been split open in the rite of *ngelempang* to release its contents, Lang tells his human followers that this seed must be planted forthwith, and this sets the stage for a remarkable allegory in which the events of war and the circumstances of taking heads are described in terms of a set of images that are drawn from the domain of agriculture and the cultivation of rice. Freeman tells us that

"The allegory begins with the preparation of a swidden. The felling of trees is symbolic of the killing of enemies¹⁰, and the firing of the swidden of the burning down of an enemy long-house. Next comes

the action of dibbling, which is seen as symbolic of sexual intercourse; and, this done, the seed from the trophy head is planted just as though it were *padi*.

From this seed there springs an abundant crop of what appears to be rice. But, on closer inspection, as Lang is the first to point out, it is seen to be a human crop; a crop of the enemies of the Iban, who are, of course, their competitors in getting a living from growing rice in the Borneo rain forest.

At the sight of this human crop, Lang and his Iban devotees are elated, for it represents a further supply of trophy heads, waiting to be gathered in. While it grows, as does *padi* in a swidden, this wished-for crop is most carefully tended. Then comes, in the words of the *timang*, the reaping of Lang's *padi*, which represents beheading. Not a head remains unharvested. Next comes the sunning of the crop, which is likened to the smoking of trophy heads, and, finally, the storing away of the harvest, which stands for the hanging of trophy heads in the gallery of a long-house" (1979: 244)

An identical sequence can also be found at the end of Sandin's transcription of the *gawai burong* festival chants and I have reproduced this in full in appendix C. Although in this instance, Sandin makes no mention of any preceeding ceremony comparable to the rite of *ngelempang*, he does however, refer briefly to a dance known as *berayah pupu buah rumah* (1977: 157). This can be roughly translated as the 'war dance to collect (gather) fruit (for) the longhouse', which suggests that a similar set of ideas may in fact be involved here - namely the acquisition of a further supply of 'fruit' (i.e. heads) for the longhouse community¹⁹. This cannot be confirmed as such, without further evidence; but whatever the significance of the *berayah* dance in this context, one should nevertheless note the close correspondence between the chants that follow and Freeman's precis of the allegory that succeeds the rites of *ngelempang*.

This portrayal of headhunting in terms of an extended agricultural metaphor, is extremely interesting for in effect it equates the taking of enemy heads with the cultivation of rice. In doing so, it provides Iban

men with a role which, at a representational level, can be seen as comparable, or equivalent to that of women cultivators. The importance of this equation vis à vis the special significance of rice farming in Iban society and culture, will be immediately apparent. At the same time, however, it can also be seen as providing an 'explanation' of the relevance of Iban men in what is essentially a uni-sexual and female-oriented model of reproduction. That is to say, if women cultivators are identified with their rice crop on the basis of a shared model of fertility - be it human or agricultural - then the portrayal of warfare as the cultivation of rice implicitly identifies the taking of heads as a male equivalent, or counterpart, to the childbearing role of Iban women.

These ideas can be depicted in the form of a diagram, in which the 'hard' lines indicate explicit associations of either a metaphorical or allegorical nature, and the dotted line an implicit association.

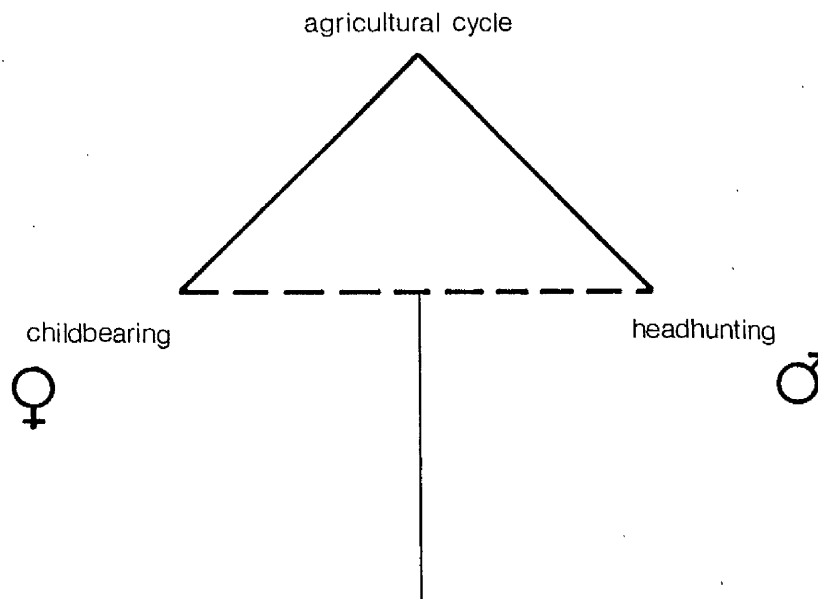


Figure 6

And of course, childbearing and headhunting are indeed comparable in many respects, for if one accepts the Iban premise that the latter brings about the fertility of rice, then both activities can in fact be regarded as essential to the continuity and well-being of society. That is to say that on the one hand, women give birth to future generations of Iban, while on the other, men - by taking heads - ensure the continuing fertility of the annual rice crop on which the livelihood of all depends²⁰. Furthermore, both activities are potentially hazardous - women may lose their lives in childbirth, and men may lose their own heads in battle²¹.

In these respects, then, there is an element of symmetry in the overall scheme of things. The apparent simplicity of this model however, is off-set and greatly complicated by the existence of other sets of associations and alternative frames of reference for the representation of headhunting, not the least of which is the portrayal of headhunting as the gathering of 'fruit'. As we have seen, it is this particular theme which is especially stressed in the oral literature and in the ritual imagery of many headhunting ceremonies, rather than the collective representation of warfare as rice cultivation. Obviously, these alternative perspectives are readily integrated in that heads, as 'fruit', provide the seed that is to be planted, but it is not immediately apparent why the emphasis should fall the way it does (i.e. upon headhunting as the gathering of fruit, rather than headhunting as agriculture). In order to see just why this is so it is necessary, therefore, to consider a further set of associations that again feature both headhunting and the notion of fertility. In this particular instance, however, the principal concern is neither rice nor fruit, but instead the attention is focused on human sexual relations and the fecundity of Iban women.

Headhunting and sexual relations

As we have just seen, in Iban oral literature warfare is on occasion allegorically depicted through the imagery of rice cultivation. Given the metaphorical identification of agricultural fertility with childbearing and female fecundity the suggestion arises that headhunting may also be linked in some way to the circumstances of human reproduction. This connection is in fact quite explicit, for Sather tells us that "[i]n Iban culture, warfare stands as a metaphoric symbol of male sexuality" (1978b: 340), and that in particular, "[s]exual congress is commonly described metaphorically by the Iban as 'combat', the penis as a 'sword' or other weapon and ejaculation as the loosening of a spear or the firing of a gun" (1978b: 343)²².

Richards similarly reports that the term *laban* - which means 'to resist, oppose, or fight' - is used in a coarse fashion by men to describe their sexual 'conquests' (1981: 173). One also learns that "[a]s in warfare, the male is said to take the initiative in sexual relationships" (Sather 1978b: 343). What is more, one finds that the Iban frequently pun the term *ngayap* - which refers to the traditional manner of courtship, or 'night visiting' (see pp. 313-314) - with *ngayau*, meaning 'to go on the warpath' (Uchibori: private communication)²³. Then again Sather also mentions that "magical prowess in martial arts [*pencak*], as ... in warfare, is thought to make a man sexually attractive to women" (1978b: 354 n.15). In short, one finds that Iban men regularly draw a parallel between their sexual lives, and in particular sexual intercourse itself, and their deeds on the field of battle. That is to say, love-making, like warfare, is led,

or instigated by men; it is something that men 'do' to, and indeed for, women: men are the 'active' partner, while women are 'passive'.

This postulated correspondence between headhunting and male sexuality manifests itself, as we have just seen, in the metaphorical portrayal of sexual congress as combat. At the same time, however, it can also be discerned in the traditional notion that young men should ideally have taken their first head before they married (Ling Roth 1896 I: 114; Anonymous 1977: 118; Gomes 1911: 22, 73-4, 266; Hose & McDougall 1966 I: 76n, II: 187; Leach 1950: 70). This idea is commonly found in the ethnographic literature for Borneo and while Hose & McDougall have strenuously denied Keane's assertion that "no girl will look at a wooer before he has laid a head or two at their feet" (cited in Hose & McDougall 1966 I: 76n), the authors are forced to admit that when "applied to the Sea Dayaks [Iban] alone, the statements have an element of truth ... [although] ... few girls make it an essential condition" (Hose & McDougall 1966 I: 76).

In a similar vein, Freeman tells us that

"On formal social occasions [the headhunter] could bask in the adulation of the women who, sitting before him on the public gallery of the long-house, would ply him with rice wine (*tuak*), chant his praise for all to hear, and incite him to further deeds of derring-do" (1979: 238).

He adds that

"A successful young head-hunter, it is said, could have his pick of the most desirable young women, and was much sought after as a husband. In contrast, a man who had never taken a head, or who was

known to be reluctant in battle, would be told by the women he courted: *Dulu niki tiang; dulu belabong isang* (First scale the posts of an enemy long-house; first bedeck your hair as does he who has taken a head)" (Freeman 1979: 238).

In other words, the taking of heads can be seen as a token of manhood, or virility, and while it may be going too far to suggest that some correlation can be drawn between prowess in warfare and male sexual potency as such, this does not alter the fact that the Iban frequently compare the sexual lives of men with certain aspects of warfare and headhunting.

These associations tend to support at least some of Freeman's conclusions regarding the presence of phallic imagery in connection with Iban headhunting, but in no way do they undermine my earlier suggestion that trophy heads should be seen as 'fruit', rather than as 'penises' as Freeman would have us believe. If one takes a closer look at Freeman's assertions, one finds that much of his evidence for the phallic nature of headhunting rests upon the prevalence of snakes and serpentine imagery in the collective representations of various aspects of warfare and headhunting. For example, he writes that

"Mythical serpents are particularly associated with the Iban cult of head-hunting. Almost every renowned head-hunter of former days was aided by a dream-derived spirit helper. The most wished for of all these spirit helpers was the *nabau*, a mythical serpent, or water dragon, which was believed to accompany the head-hunter, aiding him in his gruesomely heroic task. The canoe used by head-hunters was said to be like a snake and no menstruating woman was allowed to touch it. In the *gawai siligi* performed before a raid a spear was magically metamorphosed into a snake, which accompanied the head-hunters on their mission. This preoccupation with snakes and serpents is also conspicuous in the *gawai kenyalang*, or hornbill ritual, ... which is commonly performed by head-hunters. In this ritual the carved effigy of a rhinoceros hornbill is erected on a

lofty pole. This pole, it is believed, turns into a serpent which joins the hornbill it supports in damaging attacks on enemy long-houses" (1979: 240).

Snakes and serpents (*naga*) have a very complex cultural significance throughout most of South East Asia, but while it may indeed be possible to attach an aggressive connotation to the appearance of these creatures in Iban headhunting imagery (see for example; Perham 1878: 131; Nyuak 1977: 203; Sandin 1977: 97, 99, 100; Freeman 1979: 240), Freeman's suggestion that they also have a phallic significance would appear to be somewhat gratuitous. That is to say, the material simply does not warrant such an inference, which smacks more of ethnocentrism than it does of scholarship, while at no point does the evidence that he presents suggest that Iban trophy heads are themselves specifically equated with male genitalia.

But whatever one makes of the validity of Freeman's arguments in this last respect, one is still left with the undeniable fact that the Iban do indeed draw a number of parallels between warfare and the taking of heads on the one hand, and the sexual life of men on the other. This being the case, it is perhaps not so surprising, then, to find that on certain ritual occasions, trophy heads are depicted, not as fruit as is so frequently the case, but rather as small babies or infants.

Heads as infants

Returning to the chants that accompany major Iban headhunting festivals, it will be recalled that in the description of the headhunting expedition of the gods, the omen-birds eventually locate the precious *igi*

ranyai that they seek at the house of Nising. In Sandin's transcription of the *gawai burong* chants, this information is revealed to them by the spirit Rintong Langit Pengulor Bulan who tells them that just that morning

"At the time when I closed my *tikup attap* roof, grandsons,
I did hear it weep with anger,
Begging for a bud of the banana plant,
This morning I heard it weep with repeated whimpering,
Begging for the *tebu tengang* sugar cane"

"Enti nyerumba linda *tikup atap tadi uchu*,
Bisi ga aku ninga iya meraya nyabak ringat,
Pinta sipat ka kechuat tungkol pisang.
Enti pagi tadi bisi ga aku ninga iya,
Nyabak teki-teki,
Pinta punsi ka keru tebu tengang"
(Sandin 1977: 90-1)

In other words, it would appear that in this instance, the trophy head that is sought by the omen-birds is seen, not as the fruit of the *ranyai* palm (or some other variety of jungle tree), but rather as a small child, crying for (baby?) food.

This theme is made explicit a little further on in the chants when the omen-birds go to spy on the longhouse of the enemy, hiding out beneath the floor of the building and eavesdropping on the conversations within (Sandin 1977: 94-101). At this point in the text, the trophy heads that they are shortly to take, are specifically referred to as children (*anak*), and they are again described as whimpering and crying:

"Then speaks Nising,
What should we do with our children,
Who weep and beg to be looked after?
What should we do with our daughters,
Who speak so wistfully?"²⁴

"*Lalu bejako Nising,
Kati ko enggau anak tua,
Ke nyabak minta perindang?
Kati ko enggau anak indu tua,
Ke bejako sinu ngenang?*"

(Sandin 1977: 94-95)

Their distress is because they have experienced strange and terrifying dreams in which their death - at the hands of the omen-birds - is foretold, and although their 'mother' tries to comfort them, they are inconsolable.

I have given Sandin's transcription and translation of this sequence in full in appendix D, and similar versions are to be found in both Perham and Freeman's accounts of the chants that accompany Iban headhunting festivals (Perham 1878: 131; Freeman 1979: 240) ²⁵. For example, Freeman tells us that

"When the party reach[es] Bengkong's domain they begin (on Lang's instructions) to flatter him. ²⁶ On hearing this flattery one of the heads in his possession becomes anxious, begins to whimper, and is nursed by Bengkong's wife, the head being depicted as an infant. Then, this agitated infant (whose head is about to be taken) relates to Bengkong's wife a dream he has just had, saying: 'I dreamt of being bitten by a huge and threatening snake, from which my head hurts even more than if it had been struck against a great upstanding stump'. This dream, Bengkong's wife interprets thus: 'I fear, child, that you are about to be speared, and your head carried off in a cane container'. This is exactly what happens" (1979: 240).

In short, the longhouse of Bengkong (or Nising) is seen as a general repository of trophy heads, which are depicted as his 'children'.

This theme of trophy heads as infants is reiterated in the subsequent account of the arrival of Lang and his entourage at the

longhouse of their hosts (Perham 1878: 134; Freeman 1979: 241). Freeman writes that

"On his back Lang has a basket. There is intense curiosity as to what it contains, but this Lang refuses to divulge. Later, as, half-drunk, he is performing the dance of the head-hunter, which imitates the soaring flight of the Brahminy kite²⁷, the basket falls from Lang's shoulders, and out on to the floor rolls a severed head" (1979: 241; see also Perham 1878: 134).

Freeman tells us that on seeing the head

"the women present recoil, and, in revulsion, exclaim that it is not the fine and shining object talked of by their husbands - but, as ugly as a barbecued bat. On hearing this the head, just as though it were an infant, begins to cry. But the women persist in their denigration, likening the head to a 'pointed red pepper'²⁸. This is even more hurting, and the head, insulted, cries inconsolably" (1979: 241).

This portrayal of the trophy head as a small child is continued in the ritual nursing of the weeping 'infant'. Freeman writes:

"In an attempt to still its crying the head is nursed by a long succession of female spirits. And while this is described in the invocation, living women ritually act out its words, taking down actual trophy heads which they nurse like infants as they parade up and down the gallery of the long-house" (1979: 241).

Nyuak describes an almost identical sequence in his account of the *gawai kenyalang*, or hornbill festival. In this instance we are told that

"after midnight, the chanters of the *nimang* invocation take down the heads that were slung over the rice mortars, sling them in a blanket (as is the native fashion of carrying an infant) and proceed through the house chanting the following verses:

"U-Wa! Indu antu ari ulu Tapang Betenong,
 Lapa Senawi igi nibong,
 Enggai badu nyabak,
 Seremidak ransing rong-rong.
 U-Wa! Ayun di-talun dua bedundong,
 U-Wa! Munyi telili maga Manang Lambong.
 Adu sandik enggau menyeti bali belumpong;
 Enggai ga badu nyabak rong-rong.

'What! O goddess dwelling in the head waters of Tapang Betenong,
 Why, O Senawai, will these heads [igi nibong],
 Not cease to weep so loud and bitterly?
 Have I not rocked them in the two roped swings?
 And sung to them like the sweet voiced Manang Lambong?
 Have I not nursed them in blankets of choicest pattern [bali
 belumpong]?"

(Nyuak 1977: 220-221; my emphasis).

In other words, in this particular context, Iban trophy heads are not only depicted as infants in the text of the chants, but they are actually treated as such, being carried up and down the longhouse in the same way that a woman carries her child.

Anyone who has been to South East Asia will be familiar with the way in which mothers carry their infants on their hips, or backs, supported by a blanket slung from their shoulders, and this may throw some light on a particular aspect of the traditional welcome of newly taken heads in the rites of *enchabau arong*. We are informed that on such occasions, the captive heads of a successful warparty were ceremonially

received by the women of the community, who wrapped their precious charges in the finest blankets of their own creation and then paraded them up and down the length of the longhouse to the accompaniment of a valedictory 'head-song' (*naku*) (Howell 1977: 127, 136-38; Nyuak 1977: 201-3; Gomes 1911: 84; Harrisson 1965: 17; Sandin 1980: 40; Richards 1981: 225, 362). Nyuak tells us that

"in the chant the head is asked how it came by its fate? The head answers that it dreamed it had been bitten by a snake, or carried off by a crocodile. It is told, "That was a lucky dream for it directed the spear that struck you, it rendered keen the edge of the sword that struck you from your body" (1977: 203).

Evidently there is a close resemblance between the rites of *enchabau arung* and those described above in which the portrayal of heads as infants is explicitly made. Indeed Richards actually mentions that the *taku* (*naku*) head-song "also forms part of a war *gawai* when Lang and his people get a head" (1981: 362)²⁹. The important point to note here, however, is the wrapping of newly-taken heads in blankets for Sandin tells us that the "various *pua* blankets used for carrying a child" - and he gives a list of some ten different designs - "were used in ancient times by wives to receive ceremoniously the heads of slain enemy from the hands of their husbands on the latter's return from the warpath (1980: 86). That is to say, not only did the women of the community receive the newly taken heads from their *husbands* - i.e. their sexual partners - but they then proceeded to wrap them in the very same blankets that they would otherwise use to carry their offspring in. In this respect, then, the ritual wrapping of newly-taken heads in blankets can be seen as a kind of

metonymic exchange (see p. 28), in which trophy heads and infants are brought into conjunction with one another by virtue of a common 'container' - namely the woven textiles of Iban women³⁰.

To return to the Baleh Iban rites, we saw earlier that the newly arrived 'infant' brought by Lang is nursed by a succession of female spirits. Unfortunately, however, their attempts to comfort the crying 'child' are all to no avail and finally, in desperation, it is handed over to a group of transvestite shaman (*manang bali*) who surprisingly are able to halt its tears instantaneously and indeed succeed in actually making it laugh (Freeman 1979: 241). Freeman writes:

"This laughter, as the words of the invocation indicate, is caused by the droll appearance of the transvestite shamans, with their female attire all awry, their unformed breasts, and their broken and dangling penises. Here, I would suppose, we have a projection of male ridicule of the transvestite homosexual, but also, it would seem, the head stops crying because it feels more secure and happy in the care of the transvestite shaman, whose hands are without envy and only wish to possess and fondle" (1979: 241).

Quite what Freeman is trying to say here is not exactly clear. He seems to be suggesting that *manang bali*, by virtue of their transvestitism, are also homosexual, and - following on from his argument that trophy heads are phallic symbols - that this rite thus has homosexual connotations. My own understanding of this ceremony, however, differs somewhat from this interpretation. What is significant here, in my opinion, is that the head - depicted in this instance as an infant - can only be comforted by a transvestite male. In other words, headhunting - which, as we have seen, is both metaphorically equated with sexual

congress and male sexuality, and at the same time may be regarded as a male equivalent or counterpart of childbearing - procures metaphorical children, which can only be subsequently nursed by surrogate male 'mothers' - the transvestite *manang bali*' - who succeed in comforting them where the attempts of female spirits have all failed.

In this connection, then, it is interesting to note Sather's reference to the

"ceremonial mockery of men by women, who at times during head-hunting rites dressed as warriors complete with wooden phalli and weapons, and mimicked what Freeman (1968: 388-90) has described as the 'narcissism', or posturing pretensions of the men, especially evident on such occasions" (1978b: 343).

The ridicule of the women - both of men and the heads by which they set so much store - together with the amusement of the heads themselves at the droll appearance of the transvestite *manang bali*', can be understood as a reflection of the absurdity of the notion that headhunting can in any way be compared with childbearing²¹. But absurd though this notion may appear, the metaphorical representation of trophy heads as 'infants' nevertheless argues that some sort of connection between the taking of heads and the birth of children should be taken into consideration. This idea is of course supported indirectly by the allegorical portrayal of warfare as the cultivation of rice for as we have seen in Chapter VII, the fertility of rice is metaphorically equated with the fecundity of the women who cultivate it. The suggestion here, then, is that the description of coitus as 'combat', and the ritual depiction of trophy heads as 'infants' can be understood as providing the Iban with an idiomatic device for

linking the activities of Iban men as headhunters to the fecundity of their womenfolk. One can also argue that the allegorical portrayal of warfare as rice farming similarly links the taking of heads to the fertility of the rice crop. In this light then, headhunting is identified - at least in terms of the imagery of Iban collective representations - as being the male aspect of, or contribution to, human reproduction and agricultural productivity.

The precise nature of this relationship of headhunting to fertility is discussed below in greater depth. Before proceeding any further, however, I would like first to consider one other aspect of the collective representation of sexual relationships in terms of the imagery of warfare - namely the idea that sexual intimacy may endanger the lives of men and women.

Headhunting and sexual peril

It may be apparent that the portrayal of coitus as combat presents us with something of a paradox, and although the resolution of this ambiguity is somewhat tangential to the main thrust of my argument - namely that headhunting is identified with the procreative role of Iban men - it is still worth considering, if only so as to corroborate this association in another context. Briefly, the 'problem' is this: if sexual intercourse can be described in terms of warfare, then women, as the sexual partners of men, must, by implication, be conceived either as the victims of male aggression, or alternatively, as the aggressors of men.

In many respects this apparent 'conflict' between men and women has some basis in Iban social life, for the exclusively male institution of

headhunting can, in certain lights, be seen as a potentially divisive factor in the relationship between Iban men and women. For example, Sather writes that

"From their display of skill and leadership in warfare, men alone derived the highest honors and achieved positions of status and power in Iban society, further symbolized by praise-names and ritual distinctions, from which women, as a sex, were totally excluded. Warfare as an institution and its attendant glorification of male aggressiveness thus directly conflicted with the principles of sexual equality and egalitarianism otherwise inherent in traditional Iban social structure" (1978b: 343).

He adds that traditionally this conflict was expressed in a number of ways, but in particular through the "ceremonial mockery" of men by women in the performance of headhunting ceremonies (see above).

Whether or not the Iban themselves perceive the social inequities that arise from the prestigious nature of headhunting as an exclusively male activity as a blatant affront to an otherwise egalitarian social ethos is perhaps a moot point. Nevertheless it is clear that headhunting does generate a certain degree of tension or antagonism, between the sexes, witness the ceremonial mockery referred to above. I have already argued that this female ridicule of men, which sometimes involves the women dressing up as 'warriors' complete with wooden weapons and imitation phalli can be seen as reflecting the absurdity of the collective representation of trophy heads as 'children' and men - in particular the transvestite *manang bali* - as their 'mothers', which is found on such occasions. At the same time, however, this female mockery can also be seen as an indirect assertion, on the part of Iban women, of their own

status and social worth in their role as the bearers of future generations of Iban. In this light, the life-giving capacity of Iban women can be seen as 'competing' with the life-taking activities of Iban men.

These contrasting roles should not, however, be seen as contradicting one another; rather they are complementary in that they may be regarded as quintessential male and female activities which *together* are held to be equally necessary to the continuity and well-being of society. This complementary nature of headhunting and childbearing is of course supported by the metaphorical identification of warfare with sexual intercourse which, I have argued, can be understood as the male component, or aspect, in an indigenous model of reproduction where women are seen as the physiological agents, or in Aristotelian terms, the 'efficient cause', of new life. But if headhunting and childbearing can be seen as complementing one another, they are at the same time mutually exclusive, in that in either case one of the two sexes is automatically excluded from participation. Accordingly, one can argue that headhunting and childbearing may, in this last respect, be regarded as potential sources of 'envy' and discord between the sexes, and that in this light the collective representation of coitus as 'combat' can be seen as reflecting a very real conflict between Iban men and women arising from the sexual asymmetry of human reproduction and the social asymmetry created by the male institution of headhunting.

This position is evidently somewhat paradoxical, given the pleasurable and positive aspects of human sexual relations. Sather, however, has argued that this apparent inconsistency can be demonstrably 'resolved', in a Lévi-Straussian sense, through the imagery of the rites that protect Iban women from the dangers of parturition and childbirth,

and in the traditional defeat of the emasculating demon *antu koklir* in Iban oral literature.

Looking first at the endangering aspects of parturition, these are actualized in the form of a malevolent spirit agency - the *antu buyu*. Sather argues that the Iban conception of *antu buyu* can be understood in terms of male aggression in that they are portrayed as phallic demons or incubi who force their attention on female victims causing miscarriage and infant mortality, and endangering the life and health of the woman herself (Sather 1978b: 312 ff.). These *antu buyu* encounters take the form of erotic nightmares in which the woman is unable to resist the advances of the malevolent spirit, and these attacks are seen as violating, or 'spoiling' (*ayah*) the woman's womb (*kandong*), thus endangering her health and making her incapable of supporting any further children that she might subsequently conceive (Sather 1978b: 313-14).

These ideas can of course be readily linked to the idea of sexual congress as combat, and it is significant in this respect that the prophylactic magic employed to protect women from the unwelcomed attentions of *antu buyu* bears a close resemblance to that used by men when on the warpath, particularly in the use of charms to bestow invisibility (*engkerabun*) (Sather 1978a: 343). What is more, one finds that the rites which are subsequently performed, should these initial measures fail, are quite explicitly represented as a form of ritual warfare, in which the shaman, or *manang*, plays the role of an Iban warrior and the *antu buyu*, that of his opponent.

These latter rites, known as *pelian bebunch antu* - which means 'to kill (or wound) an *antu*' - involve the removal of threatening *antu buyu* through their defeat in 'spiritual combat' (see p. 169). Sather tells us

that only a fully consecrated *manang* can perform this task, and although the shaman must be a man, ideally he should be a transvestite *manang bali'* (Sather 1978b: 342). The *manang* first lures the *antu buyu* to the *bilek* apartment of his victim, tempting it with food delicacies and using the seductive language of courtship; then, having lulled the demon into a false sense of security, he throws off his disguise and attacks the malevolent incubus with his sword (Sather 1978b: 341)³². Perham, who actually describes this rite as "ghostly warfare" (1887: 99), reports that "there is a scuffle and a clash of weapons and it is announced that the demoniac spirit is dead" (Perham 1887: 99). In some instances there is even visible proof of this supernatural engagement in the form of a few drops of blood, or the corpse of a small animal such as a monkey or a snake which is said to be the corporeal manifestation of the defeated *antu buyu* (Perham 1887: 99; Howell & Bailey 1900: 122; Gomes 1911: 173; Sather 1978b: 341; Richards 1981: 263). As Sather himself remarks, the *manang*, in his role as "champion or slayer of incubi and other demonic spirits, replicates in the supernatural sphere the role traditionally played by the male warrior in the human world" (1978b: 343). In this way, the threatening *antu buyu* is vanquished and normal sexual relations restored.

The *antu buyu*, then, can be understood as having a two-fold significance. On the one hand it personifies the physiological dangers of parturition, while on the other, it can be seen as the 'logical' expression of the representation of sexual intercourse as combat. Women, however, may be protected from these endangering aspects of sexual relations - be they real or imaginary - by ritual warfare, which is waged on their behalf by the transvestite *manang bali'*, and in this way, it is suggested, the

ambiguities that arise from the portrayal of coitus as combat are counteracted or concealed (Sather 1978b: 350). Thus Sather writes:

"the male shaman, in his anti-demonic role, is the spiritual counterpart of the warrior. Warfare is the principal threat to female sexuality. But in his *pelian*, the shaman reverses the relationship and, as a champion, he vanquishes the male incubus, thus masking this underlying conflict and, by the transposition of his sexual identity [ie, as *manang bali*], laying stress, in contrast, on the life-sustaining solidarity of sexual bonds" (1978b: 350).

But if the representation of coitus as warfare implies that sexual relations may endanger the lives of women, then by the same token, sexual intercourse must be equally threatening to men for women are, in effect, their opponents and combatants. That is to say that

"by conceptualizing sexual intercourse as armed combat, women are made coequal adversaries of men, capable of challenging male assertions of prowess. It is exactly here that sexuality poses a threat to men as well as women. During ritual mockery [at headhunting festivals - above] women not only mocked the status pretensions of male warriors, but more directly belittled their potency" (Sather: 1978b: 343)

This threatening aspect of female sexuality - which arises from the implicit status of women as the 'adversaries' of men - can also be seen in the negative influence that women can have on headhunting. For example, we are told that, although magical prowess in the martial arts is thought to make a man more sexually attractive to women, training must take place in a secluded spot, away from the eyes of women, for their presence is

felt to render their magic ineffective (Sather 1978b: 354 n.15). Similarly, a verse in the *sabak* dirge recorded by Sandin warns that headhunting charms must be kept wrapped up in steel trunks, so that they are not contaminated by the perfume (*minyak*) of "clever maidens" (*dara pandai*) - i.e. those women who are skilled at weaving and who are thus the feminine counterpart of leading male warriors (1966: 33-34).

More significantly, however, this threatening aspect of female sexuality is personified in the form of a malevolent spirit agency - the *antu koklir* - who can be seen as the feminine counterpart to the phallic *antu buyu*. That is to say that women who die in pregnancy, in childbirth, or in the month immediately following delivery, are liable to become *antu koklir* unless special ritual precautions are taken (Howell & Bailey 1900: 80; Freeman 1958: 415; Harriison & Sandin 1966: 119-120; Jensen 1974: 95; Sather 1978b: 326-28; Richards 1981: 166). The *antu koklir* is portrayed as a beautiful seductress who lures men into her embrace only to tear their testicles from their scrotum and devour them. This invariably proves to be fatal, and at one level of belief, the *antu koklir* can be seen as extending the dangers of parturition to Iban men^{ss}. By this I mean that the women who die in childbirth are liable to return to prey upon lustful men, whom they hold to be responsible for their untimely death (Jensen 1974: 95).

In another light, however, the *antu koklir* may be seen as an embodiment of the threatening aspects of female sexuality which is of course implicit in the identification of women as the 'adversaries' of men in the metaphorical portrayal of sexual intercourse as warfare. Sather comments that

"[i]n this regard the *koklir* represents the ultimate female challenge. Thus she is seen by men, not as a seductress, but as a hostile emasculator who tears away and ingests the tangible signs of male sexuality, the sexual organs" (1978b: 343-44).

In other words, the *antu koklir* can be thought of not just simply as a female counterpart of the *antu buyu*, but also as the expression, or manifestation of a theoretical conflict between men and women, arising from the collective representation of coitus as 'combat'.

In this last respect it is especially interesting to note the manner in which *antu koklir* are usually defeated. Sather tells us that if one examines the details of any number of *koklir* stories one finds that the intended victim is frequently saved by the intercession of a female figure, who in most instances is the man's wife (1978b: 344-45). What is more the woman usually overcomes her supernatural opponent by means of violent measures that leave the *antu koklir* mortally wounded³⁴. For example, Sather cites one story in which the woman slays the *antu koklir* by cutting her throat, and another in which she actually decapitates her opponent; in both instances the malevolent creature, on receiving its fatal wound materializes in an animal manifestation - that of the *enturun* or bear cat (*Arctictis binturong*) (Sather 1978b: 344-45).

These stories, Sather argues, can be seen as parallels of the rite of *pelian bebunoh antu*, in which the *manang*, or shaman, defeats the threatening incubus spirit *antu buyu* in ritual combat, replicating as he does so the traditional role of the Iban warrior in a supernatural dimension. Sather comments that in the second of the two examples he gives "the symbolic association of the demon slayer [i.e. the woman] and the warrior is emphasized in the severing of the *koklir*'s head" (1978b:

345), while the materialization of the corpse again echoes the *pelian* ritual in which the slain *antu buyu* may similarly assume an animal form (above). One should also note that the woman protagonist is typically the man's wife, and that she is thus his sexual partner. In this respect she is also his theoretical 'opponent' - given the portrayal of coitus as combat - but in the context of the *antu koklir* stories she becomes his defender, engaging his supernatural aggressor in battle and thereby counteracting the negative aspects of this paradoxical representation of sexual relationships. Thus Sather writes:

"[t]he slaying [of the *koklir*] itself recreates the *pelian bebunoh*, except that the sexual role of the slayer and victim are reversed. The resolution of conflict has an identical form except that it is now a woman who becomes the anti-demonic champion, defending men against an imagined female assailant" (1978b: 345).

In summary, then, Sather has demonstrated how ambiguities arising from the portrayal of sexual congress as 'combat' can be linked to an idea of malevolent spirit agencies - the *antu buyu* and the *antu koklir* - and the very real risks that women face in pregnancy and childbirth. These connections are revealed in the manner in which these demoniac spirits are defeated, which, according to Sather, reproduces in the supernatural sphere the traditional role of the Iban warrior. This idea is explicit in the ritual procedures of the *pelian bebunoh antu*, and is reiterated in the imagery of combat, and even decapitation, that is commonly found in traditional accounts of *antu koklir* encounters. In either context, the theme of warfare is turned to a positive end in the defence of male and female victims from supernatural aggressors that prey upon their

sexuality, by anti-demoniac champions of the opposite sex. In this way, the ambivalence underlying Iban attitudes towards sexual relations - which, in certain lights may be seen as a logical expression of the metaphorical portrayal of coitus as combat, and the concomitant idea of women as the co-adversaries of men - is "masked" (Sather 1978b: 349), or 'resolved' in the Lévi-Straussian sense³⁵. One can also argue that this imagery at the same time stresses the theme of a necessity for mutual co-operation between the sexes, and it is this latter principle which is, perhaps, the most significant as far as our present interests are concerned, for it again points to the complementary nature of the relationship between headhunting as a male activity, and the reproductive role of Iban women - be it as the bearers of children or the cultivators of rice.

Headhunting and the superior status of men

To return to the central issue of this chapter - namely the ritual significance of headhunting and its implications as regards the Iban conception of male and female gender - we have seen that the taking of heads, as portrayed in Iban cultural discourse, can be understood in two different ways. That is to say, on the one hand, it is depicted as the gathering of 'fruit' - which are of course the heads of the enemy; while on the other, it is identified as the reaping of a human crop. At the same time, one finds that sexual relations - as seen from a male perspective - are often described as combat, while trophy heads are on occasions ritually treated as if they were infants. These various forms of representation, or frames of reference, can be linked, I have argued, to an

indigenous model of agricultural fertility in which the increase of rice is identified with the circumstances of childbearing and female fecundity. That is to say, they find a place for Iban men and male sexuality in what is otherwise an ostensibly unisexual, and by implication, essentially feminine mode of reproduction. In other words, the allegorical portrayal of warfare as the cultivation of rice, and the metaphorical descriptions of coitus as combat can be understood as an assertion of the idea that headhunting is the male contribution, or counterpart, to childbearing and rice farming.

In this light then, it is possible to divide the Iban view of sexual reproduction into two complementary aspects or dimensions, which, at a representational level, are projected onto the domains of agriculture and warfare. By this I mean that on the one hand we have childbearing, which may be regarded as the female component of reproduction, and on the other, we have sexual intercourse, which can be thought of primarily as the male contribution to the process (in that it is men who are considered to take the initiative, as opposed to women who are the recipients of their attentions). These two aspects of the human reproductive process are aligned - through metaphorical identification and implicit association - with the cultivation of rice and the taking of heads, respectively. This can be discerned in the imagery of Iban farming rituals and agricultural discourse generally, where the fertility of rice is equated with the fecundity of women; and in the description of sexual relationships through the imagery of warfare and combat. The two 'halves' of this indigenous model of reproduction - the one male, the other female - are then brought together, or joined, by the allegorical portrayal of headhunting as rice farming, which links the taking of heads to the

productivity of rice and, by implicit extension, the fecundity of Iban women (ie., as embodied in the fertility of their rice crop).

These ideas and associations can again be depicted in diagrammatic form:

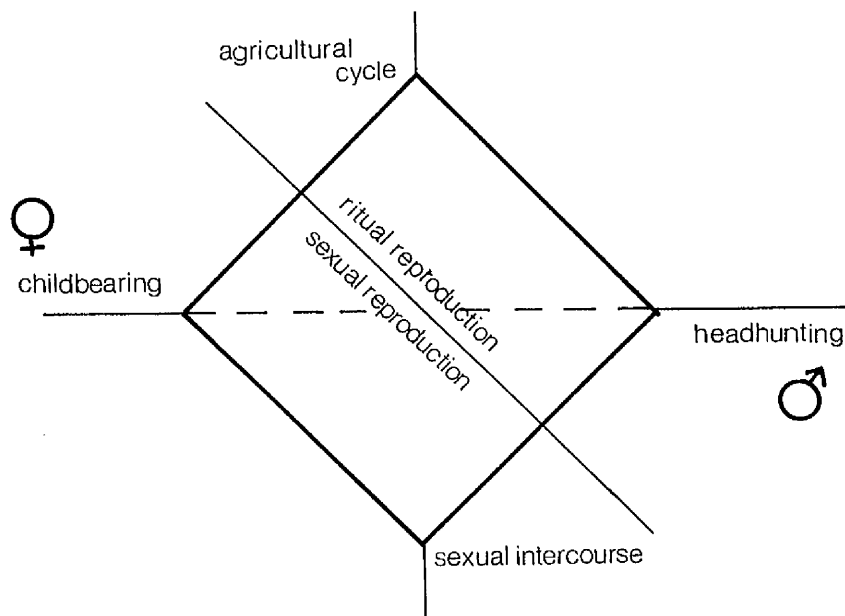


fig 7

That is to say, on the one hand, we have headhunting and childbearing, which, I have argued, may be regarded as definitive, or quintessential, male and female gender roles, and which at the same time, are mutually exclusive to the opposite sex. Then on the other hand, we have sexual intercourse and agriculture, which require the participation of *both* sexes,

but which nevertheless are primarily oriented towards one or other of the two sexes: i.e. men, in the case of sexual relationships; and women, in the case of rice farming.

At first sight, this indigenous model of male and female sexuality and gender roles would appear to be perfectly symmetrical or 'balanced'. That is to say, men go headhunting and sleep with women, while women cultivate rice and give birth to children. This apparent equity between the sexes is not, however, reflected socially in as far as the evaluation of male and female gender is concerned, for one finds that despite a general principle of sexual equality as regards rights, obligations, responsibilities and so forth, Iban men are still perceived as being in some way 'superior', or more 'important' to their womenfolk. This notion is supported by Iban oral literature where male heroes are almost invariably depicted - *antu koklir* stories aside - as the champions of women who are frequently portrayed in a less favourable light (Sutlive 1977; see below). Sather has argued (above), that this sexual asymmetry can be directly linked to the extraordinary prestige that traditionally surrounded warfare and the taking of heads. In this respect, then, headhunting - as a social institution - can be seen as a singular, but most significant, exception to the otherwise equanimous evaluation of gender in Iban social ideology. Why is this so? And how is this inequality supported in the collective representation of male and female gender? The answers to these questions, I shall argue, can in fact be ultimately related to the portrayal of headhunting as the gathering of 'fruit', and the idea of Iban men as the champions of their womenfolk.

Headhunting, reproduction and causation

Sutlive, in his discussion of Iban oral literature (1977), observes that in the stories of the legendary heroes

"the person and role of Kumang, helps set the stage for the remarkable feats of Keling as the personhood and role of Iban women set the stage for the accomplishments of Iban men" (1977: 158).

For example, the story of Keling's courtship of Kumang, serves as a backdrop for a series of episodes which show off the extraordinary abilities of Keling in all manner of male pursuits from the felling of trees to the taking of heads (Brooke-Low, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 323-337; Sutlive 1977: 158). At the same time, Sutlive also finds that

"not only do the person and role of Kumang and the Iban woman set the stage for the activities of Keling and Iban men, they *require* the remarkable abilities of the male figures. In the accounts in which Kumang and other female characters appear, they frequently are guilty of some indiscretion or violation of ritual prohibition that must be corrected by the action of the current hero" (1977: 159; emphasis in text).

Furthermore, "the character of Kumang and Iban women is of such a nature as to make the correctives of males constantly necessary" (Sutlive 1977: 159). Thus women are generally said to be gullible, impatient, and with jealous tendencies, and for these reasons they should be restricted from important decision-making activities and they should keep to their place, which is the *bilek* (Sutlive 1977: 159).

A number of interesting points arise from this analysis, but perhaps the most important as far as our present interests are concerned, is the idea that the heroic exploits of men are often necessitated by the 'flawed', or 'imperfect', nature of women. What is more, one finds that in many instances these male endeavours are directly related to the field of battle or transformations of this theme (for example the felling of trees). In other words, one can argue that the stories of the legendary heroes, apart from being merely entertaining, serve to foster the notion that Iban women regularly require, for one reason or another, the remarkable abilities of their menfolk, particularly in their role as headhunters.

This general theme is of special significance when it comes to the theory of headhunting for one finds that in the festival chants it is always the women, rather than the men, who require freshly taken trophy heads. For example, in Freeman's description of Lang's reception of the invitation to a head feast, we are told that it is his "daughters [who] point out, somewhat petulantly, that they have no gift to take with them and ask their father and their husbands to procure a freshly taken head" (1979: 240). Similarly, in both Perham's and Sandin's accounts of this sequence, it is Endu Dara Tinchin Temaga - the youngest daughter of Lang - who refuses to attend the festival unless she is able to bring a freshly taken head with her as a gift for their mortal hosts (Perham 1978: 130; Sandin 1977: 69, 71). Then again, in the *sabak* death dirge and the chants accompanying the *gawai antu* festival in commemoration of the dead, one finds that when the party of the dead reach the grove of the *ranyai* palm (Madang Ranyai), it is the women of the company who urge the men to cut down the fruit, taunting them and casting aspersions as to their bravery and strength (Sandin 1961: 186; 1966: 68). In other words, in the oral

literature one finds that it is women who are repeatedly portrayed as the prime instigators of men's headhunting.

This theme would appear to have been reiterated in real life, for as we have seen, newly acquired heads are presented to the women of the community, who wrap them in their best textiles and ceremonially parade them up and down the longhouse gallery. Furthermore, an anonymous informant tells us that from early infancy, all male children are instructed by their grandmothers as to the expediency of taking heads (1977: 118); the author adds

"And so it goes through the whole of his life; the women, in their cruelty and blood-thirstiness, are the cause of this headhunting. At every festival the old skulls are taken from the fire-place, where they are preserved and smoked from generation to generation, and carried through the house by some women. A monotonous song is sung by the women in honour of the hero who cut off the head, and in derision of the poor victims whose skulls are carried round; and again and again the infernal chorus is heard: '*Agi ngambi, agi ngambi*' (bring us more of them) (Anonymous 1977: 118-19).

In short, men go headhunting in order to fulfill these demands or 'needs' of their womenfolk.

This raises the question of why Iban women 'need' their menfolk to go headhunting for them, the suggestion here being that the answer lies with Iban notions of gender and reproduction. As we have seen, in the rites of *ngelempang* trophy heads are ritually depicted as containing seed of all kinds, while elsewhere, the taking of heads is itself compared to both the gathering of fruit or alternatively, as the reaping of a human crop. In this respect, it seems clear that the ritual significance of Iban headhunting is linked to the idea that the taking of heads procures seed -

and in particular, *padi pun* - for future farming seasons. Following on from this, then, one can argue that Iban women need their menfolk to go headhunting in order to obtain further supplies of seed for their rice farms.

At the same time, though, one also finds that trophy heads are, on occasion, ritually depicted as 'infants', which, on their introduction into the longhouse are ceremonially presented to the women of the community. In this latter instance, it is evident that the headhunting activities of Iban men are also seen as contributing to the fecundity of their womenfolk. In this respect then, one can argue that Iban women need to go headhunting in order to supply them, not only with seed, but also children. These ideas are of course supported by the metaphorical identification of coitus with combat which grounds the posited 'effects' of headhunting in the biological realities of human reproduction, thus imbuing the postulated link between the taking of heads and the fertility of rice and women with a self-evident character (cf. Douglas 1975).

These themes are drawn together in the mythological account of the acquisition of the first rice. This set of myths must be distinguished from those discussed earlier (p. 284-285) which were primarily concerned with the physical origins, or creation of rice, from the body of woman, but there is a certain degree of overlap or consistency in that although the first rice is procured by men - Simpi Impang³⁶ and his brother Empang Raga - they obtain their seed from a female figure. In some accounts she is the vermin spirit Indai Jebu or Bunsu Tikus (Sandin 1957: 118 ff.; Harrison & Sandin 1966: 262; Jensen 1974: 76-77; Sather 1980a: 69; Richards 1981: 125); in others she is the rice sparrow spirit Ini Raja Pipit (Perham, in Ling Roth I 1896: 301; Jensen 1966: 19-20; 1974: 78;

Sutlive 1978: 63; Richards 1981: 285). But what is more important, at least in as far as our present interests are concerned, is the fact that the first rice was obtained from this female figure *by men*, and that in some accounts they do so by trickery and subterfuge, stealing their prize from Ini Raja Pipit and hiding it under their foreskins to escape detection (Jensen 1966: 19-20; 1974: 78; Sutlive 1978: 63).

For example, Jensen tells us that

"One detail, found in many accounts and very popular with the Iban, insists that the seed of rice was not given but stolen. According to a Delok version, Simpang-Impang and his brother (?) Empang Raga tried on three occasions to steal rice seed, which they particularly liked, from the Sparrow Spirit. On the first attempt they put in the blow-pipe dart-case which they had with them, but she found it. On the second occasion also she discovered it on their person, but the third time they had the bright idea of secreting a seed beneath the foreskin. Thus they were successful and acquired rice for themselves" (1974: 78).

This account is interesting in two respects. On the one hand the subterfuge practised by Simpi Impang and Empang Raga is reminiscent of the deception of the demon Nising by the omen-birds in the chants that accompany headhunting festivals. On the other hand, the fact that the two men hide their stolen trophies under their foreskins simultaneously recalls the idea of dibbling as sexual intercourse, and the phallic shape of the dibber itself (see p. 286). In other words, this particular myth can be seen as drawing together the themes of male sexuality and the introduction of rice into Iban society - an association of ideas that should, I suggest, be considered in conjunction with the metaphorical description of coitus as combat and the portrayal of headhunting as the

gathering of seed-bearing fruit, which, when planted, brings forth not rice, but a human crop.

To elaborate, in the light of the story of Simpi-Impang it would appear that it may indeed be possible to draw a connection between seed (*benih*) and semen (*cinit*) in the manner that Freeman has suggested (above). This fact alone should not, however, be seen as an endorsement of his conclusion that trophy heads must therefore be seen as phallic symbols. By this I mean that given the wholesale vegetable imagery of Iban collective representations and the parallels that are drawn between human reproduction and the fertility of rice, it is perfectly consistent that semen should be identified with seed (cf. the "personification" of rice seed at the rites of *nyinklin benih* - see p. 236-237). But in as far as trophy heads themselves are concerned, these, as we have repeatedly seen, are most emphatically portrayed as fruit, not male genitalia. It is in this capacity then, that they are identified as the repositories of seed.

As for the interrelationship between rice seed, headhunting and reproduction, it will be apparent that the myth of Simpi-Impang, like the collective representation of headhunting as fruit-gathering, is constructed around the idea of men as the procurers of seed. This is in fact an accurate reflection of a real life situation, for Iban men frequently return from their *bejalai* expeditions with new varieties of rice which are then added to the family's selection of grains (Uchibori: private communication³⁷). At the same time, men are also responsible for dibbling the holes into which this seed is placed, and this activity is identified with sexual intercourse. In this connection, women are like the soil in which this seed is sown - in that they are both containers or receptacles

that nourish and sustain the development of new life - while dibbling, itself, really is 'like' sexual intercourse for it is the means by which women are 'opened up' to receive the seed acquired by men.

In this light then, it is evident that Freeman's suggestion of a connection between seed and semen is in fact perfectly consistent with other Iban notions of fertility and fecundity. But what is more important to note in this instance is the fact that headhunting - seen here as the procuring of seed - is not just simply the male counterpart to childbearing, but rather is a 'necessary' precondition for the whole reproductive cycle - both human and agricultural - to occur in the first place. In other words, it would appear that what we are dealing with here is an indigenous model of causation. That is to say, women may well be regarded as the physiological agents of reproduction - in that children are the offspring of their bodies and the increase of rice is equated with childbearing and female fecundity - but ultimately they 'need' men, both as progenitors, and, ritually, as headhunters, in order to supply them with the necessary raw materials for this process to take place, i.e. the seed itself. In this respect it is therefore interesting to find that the Iban themselves say that the planting season - which, significantly, they refer to as 'dibbling' (*tugal*), rather than 'sowing' (*menih*) - is the most important stage in the farming season (Uchibori 1978: 78). The implication here is that this is because in ritual terms, dibbling, like sexual intercourse, is the point at which and the means by which, the seed, acquired by men through headhunting, is passed on, or injected into, the female cycle of reproduction, be it agricultural or human. In this way the two spheres of headhunting and agriculture are brought into conjunction with one another, just as sexual relations bring together men and women in

the process of human procreation. But it is men as headhunters - i.e. as the gatherers of this seed-bearing 'fruit' - who are represented as the ultimate 'cause', or instigators, of all this reproduction, and it is this understanding, I suggest, which both underlies, or at least validates, the traditional ascendancy of Iban men over their womenfolk.

Harvest-home and the seasonal nature of headhunting

Before concluding, there is one further point of interest that is worth considering in connection with the relationship between headhunting and fertility, and this is to do with the timing of headhunting raids vis à vis the annual rice cycle. By this I mean that in the past the launching of sorties into enemy territory - which often involved spending several weeks, even months, away from home - was influenced to a large extent by the demands of the farming season. Thus one finds that headhunting expeditions were traditionally mounted in the interval between the felling season and the carrying in of the harvest - i.e. the two points in the agricultural cycle that specifically require the participation of men. For example, Gomes writes that "the time of year generally chosen [for headhunting raids] would be just after the planting season because that would give the men a clear three months before the harvest" (1911: 76). Similarly, Brooke-Low reports that

"The period usually selected for any expedition on a large scale is that immediately after the seed planting or after the harvest; the former is preferred when available as they can spare the time better, and have three months clear before they are required to gather in the harvest. In the latter case they would probably have no dry weather to dry the clearings, which therefore would not burn well" (1892: 55).

In this respect then, one can argue that headhunting can, in certain lights, be seen as a seasonal phenomenon.

The important thing to note in this context is that the return of Iban men from the warpath traditionally coincided with the advent of the rice harvest. What is more, the harvest itself can be regarded as a kind of homecoming - that of the *semengat padi* who are welcomed into the longhouse after their long absence in the rice fields during the course of the farming season. For example, Sather, in his description of Saribas Iban harvest rituals, writes that "[h]aving attained maturity or 'maidenhood', the *padi tanchang*, representing here the collective rice souls of the now ripened padi, is addressed as if it were a young woman *about to be received in ceremonial welcome by the longhouse from which she has long been absent, having passed her 'childhood' in the padi field*" (1977a: 161; my emphasis). Similarly, Freeman reports that "when the *padi* spirits have been conducted back to the long-house - a trail of puffed rice (*rendai*) is scattered for them to tread - they are welcomed with ceremony such as the Iban reserve for their most distinguished guests" (1970: 156; see also 1970: 214-15). In other words, the months of April and May, when the rice is harvested, were traditionally a time of homecoming - of both rice and men - and a time which saw the renewal or rejuvenation of the Iban economy and society generally as the season's harvest replenished exhausted rice stocks and returning warparties arrived home with heads, slaves and the spoils of war.

The important point to note here is that these two homecomings - the one of men from the warpath, the other of rice and *semengat padi* from the fields - can be seen as corroborating the assertion of a causal relationship between headhunting and the fertility of rice²⁸. What is

more, it is not too fanciful to suggest that in the past, the time of the harvest and the weeks immediately following would have been a period when many Iban children were conceived - i.e. with the return of the young men of the community after an extended period of absence while on the warpath. In this particular instance the coincidence of the homecoming of men with the impregnation of women would appear to support the postulated significance of headhunting vis à vis the fertility of women, while the simultaneous correspondence between conception and the maturation of the rice - which at this precise moment in the rice cycle is described through images of maidenhood, redolent with the promise of future fecundity - can also be seen as an affirmation of the metaphorical identification of the increase of rice with the fertility of the women who cultivate it.

Obviously this latter correspondence must remain largely conjectural, and anyway should be thought of more as a tendency, rather than a regularity of Iban demographics. Nevertheless, the point is a valid one, I believe, and one that should be set against the background of our earlier discussion regarding the various parallels that the Iban draw between their own existence and that of their rice crop (chapters 6 and 7). This native self-identification with rice, I have suggested, can be linked to a more general set of ideas and associations wherein the world of plants has furnished the Iban with a rich and vivid idiom through which a number of important cultural concerns and social issues may be expressed. The point that I particularly wish to make here, however, is that Iban rice farming, by its very nature, tends to reinforce this wider correspondence that the Iban perceive between their own lives and the realm of plants. That is to say, the demands of the annual rice cycle, in terms of organization of labour and so forth, creates a set of

circumstances, or conditions, by which the major events of Iban daily life - both agricultural and otherwise - take on a seasonal character that follows the annual maturation of the rice crop. In other words, while the fortunes of any society may be subject to fluctuations throughout the year, in the Iban case, prosperity and well-being are specifically related to the time of the annual rice harvest when the community's grain supplies are replenished and the men return from the warpath with heads, slaves, booty and the promise of children. In this respect one can therefore argue that while Iban social and religious discourse draws heavily on the domain of plants as a source of images and categories for the collective representation of a variety of social concerns and interests, the very tempo, or rhythm, of community life is itself imbued with an organic character in that many of the key events in Iban daily life - including the conception of children - can, in varying degrees, be related to the annual maturation of the rice crop.

Conclusion

My principal aim in this chapter has been to examine the ritual significance of headhunting, as a male institution, within the framework of traditional Iban society. In doing so, I argued that in ritual terms the role of men as headhunters could be contrasted with that of women as the bearers of children and the cultivators of rice. This conception of male and female gender roles is not a perfectly balanced one, however, for there is a certain asymmetry between the sexes reflected in the evaluation, or relative importance of men and women at a social level. This, I argued, is because headhunting is seen not just as simply the male equivalent, or

counterpart, of childbearing and rice cultivation; rather it is thought of as an 'essential' precondition for reproduction - be it human or agricultural - to take place.

This understanding arises from the fact that headhunting is repeatedly depicted as the gathering of fruit - the fruit of the mythical *ranyai* palm to be precise - from whose seeds spring forth not only rice and other edible plants but also human beings. Obviously the acquisition of this most precious fruit is necessarily prior to the subsequent processes of germination, growth and re-generation, and in this respect the Iban theory of reproduction is subject to a hierarchy of cause. By this I mean that while in Aristotelian terms, women and female physiology may be thought of as supplying the 'efficient cause' of reproduction (i.e. the immediate creating conditions), it is men who provide the 'material cause' of reproduction, in that it is they who are ultimately responsible for obtaining the raw materials - i.e. the seed - by which this process can take place. In other words, what we are dealing with here is an idea of causal priority, wherein the act of taking heads is seen as a necessary precondition for procuring the fertility of rice and women.

This postulated connection between headhunting and reproduction is of course supported by the metaphorical portrayal of male sexuality as warfare, for this identifies the ritual implications of headhunting with the biological necessity of intercourse as an essential precondition of conception. That is to say, the description of coitus as combat can be interpreted as a reflection of a more general set of assumptions regarding the relationship of headhunting to the fertility of rice and women. This nexus of ideas and imagery can be diagrammatically represented in the

following way where the arrows indicate a connection between a supposed 'cause' and its 'effects'

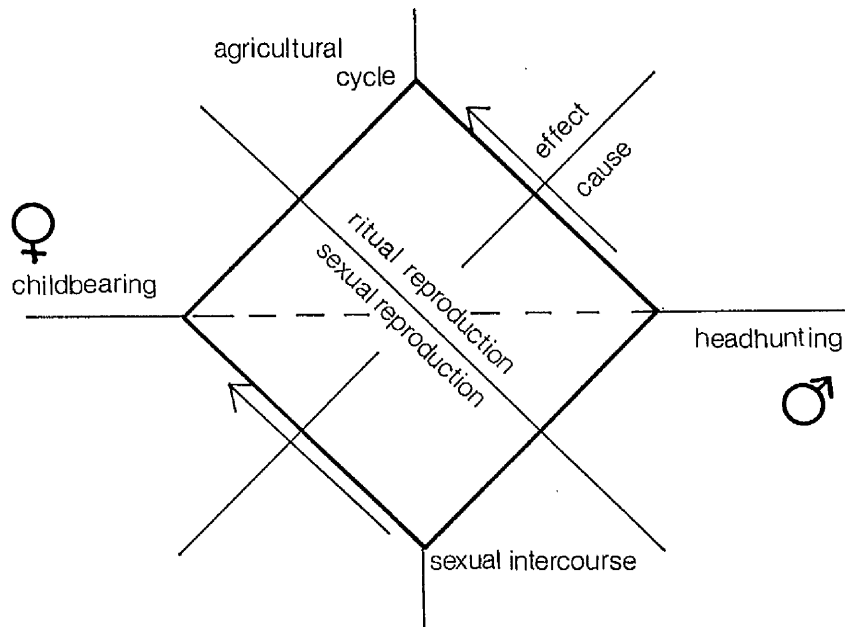


Figure 8

In this way then, what is purely a cultural hypothesis - namely that the taking of heads brings about the fertility of rice and women - is, by means of a compound series of metaphors and ritual identifications, anchored in the realities of human procreation as a biological process. In this light the relationship between headhunting and reproduction is instilled with something of an axiomatic quality by virtue of its putative correspondence with an unquestionable 'fact of life'. In short, Iban men *must* go headhunting if the continued fecundity of their rice crop and womenfolk is to be assured.

NOTES - chapter VIII

1. n.b. Downs was a student at Leiden, and this particular interpretation of Indonesian headhunting practices provides another good example of a structural analysis in the Leiden theoretical tradition - ie, based on the notion of an indigenous dualism pervading all levels of social and religious life (see p. 11)
2. The terms *igi* and *leka* are in fact numeral classifiers for seed (*benih*) as well as fruit (*buah*). The words *benih* and *buah*, however, are usually omitted when referring to the seed or fruit of a particular plant, as for example in '*tiga igi/leka rian*' - 'three durian fruit'. Sandin in his transcription of the chants that accompany the headhunting festival *gawai burung* - where references to head trophies are always preceded by the prefix *igi* or *leka* - consistently translates these terms as 'seed'. Elsewhere in the ethnographic literature, however, trophy heads are invariably described as 'fruit', and the preference for this interpretation of *igi* and *leka*, over 'seed', has been confirmed for me by Uchibori (private communication). The suggestion here then, is that Sandin's use of 'seed' rather than 'fruit' stems from his apparent failure to grasp the true significance of the ritual imagery of Iban headhunting ceremonies in which the idea of trophy heads as fruit plays a crucial role (see above). (n.b. one should also note in this connection that the term *pala* - cf. *antu pala* = a head trophy - in Sanskrit means fruit, see p. 117 and p. 148 n.35 for a brief discussion of Indian influences).
3. Trophy heads are quite often referred to by the titles of Balang Begumba or Balang Begundai. The terms *gumba* and *gundai* refer to two different styles of haircut - Howell reports that the *gumba* is "the Dayak dandy's present [1900] fashion" (1900: 54) - while *balang*, meaning a large bottle or vessel (Richards 1981: 24), may possibly be related to the idea of head trophies as the containers of seed.
4. n.b. In the *sabak* text the recently deceased - who is somewhat reluctant to join the party of the dead - is told

that he cannot refuse to accompany them since his hands "have wrongly held the untouchable magical *ranyai* fruit, not even supposed to be seen with ordinary eyes - else one's very parents must die" (Harrisson 1965: 17; Sandin 1966: 31).

5. *Isang* are species of palm whose leaves are frequently used to denote success on the warpath (Richards 1981: 118). Panggau Libau, the home of the legendary headhunting heroes of Iban mythology, is described as being 'waved over by *isang* leaves' (Richards 1981: 118; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 226-7), while the longhouse of Lang Sengalang Burong is situated on the 'crest of the hill slope (always) hung with *isang* leaves' (Richards 1981: 118). Similarly the Iban afterworld is glowingly referred to as the 'land of the curling, or arching, *isang*' (Dickson 1951: 458), the implication being that they are all the scene of many victorious homecomings.
6. In Perham's account we are told that having first rendered Nising senseless with rice wine, the omen-birds snatch their prize from his turban (1878: 131).
7. Weaving is regularly identified as the female equivalent of headhunting, and those women who are skilled (*pandai*) in this task are acknowledged as the feminine counterpart of great war leaders (Freeman 1957: 173; Sather 1977b: xiv-xv). As the ritual pole is raised women throw eggs and balls of glutinous rice at it for it is said that those who find their target will become skilled in weaving (Sandin 1977: 53; Sather 1977b: xv; Howell 1977: 132; Gomes 1911: 213).
8. Take, for example, the following verse:
*"Lulu ketawa rengai-rengai,
 Anak leka Begumba Igi Ranyai,
 Bejalai ngerejang penyarang rumah panjai,
 Iya ga gaga ria mansang nandai,
 Ngagai sida ke bekereja begawai besai,
 Niri ka chandi tiang ranyai..."*
 Then laughing loudly,
 The fruit [see p. 403 n.2] of Begumba Igi Ranyai,
 Walks along the longhouse,
 For he is very happy to attend the feast,
 To meet the hosts at the festival,
 When they erect the sacred *ranyai* pole..."
 (Sandin 1977: 48)

9. n.b. In Georgie's transcription of an Iban love song he translates the word *ranyai* as a "pole where heads are hung during head celebrations" (1959: 23). I.e. in some instances the heads would appear to be actually suspended from the pole as fruit are clustered around the trunk of a palm tree.

10. Richards describes the Iban *be-rayah* dance as a "[r]itual leaping dance of war-leaders with arms outstretched in imitation of a soaring kite (*lang ngindang*)" (1981: 43). The kite imagery can of course be related to the avian manifestation of Lang Sengalang Burong as a fish eagle (*Haliastur intermedius*) (see p. 111).

11. The arrival of Lang may sometimes be signaled by the appearance of a fish eagle in the skies overhead (see p. 147 n.30).

12. n.b. the *gawai ijok pumpong* also involves the erection of a ceremonial column, at the top of which is placed a jar of toddy made from the heart of the *ijok* palm (Howell 1977: 91, 140; Richards 1981: 113). Howell remarks that "the reason for this is quite unknown to the Dayaks of today but it may be presumed to be an offering to the god of war (Sengalang Burong) with which to quench his thirst" (1977: 140).

13. Although the theme of phallic symbolism is central to his interpretation of Iban headhunting, Freeman does not actually specify what these purportedly phallic objects are, or why they should have this connotation.

14. n.b. Sandin actually describes the *gawai kelingkang* as the first stage in the nine-fold *gawai burong* series (1977: 13).

15. One should note here the parallel between the construction of *ranyai* shrines as a representation of the mythical *nibong* palm, and the erection of *pagar api* during *pelian* ceremonies as a representation of the patient's *ayu* or *bungai*.

16. It is important to note in this connection that Freeman reports that the *ranyai* "[u]nder Iban custom ... should be set

up by a man who has himself taken a head" (1979: 239; my emphasis).

17. One should also note the possible significance of *bungai jarau* in this connection. This is a stick which is whittled and its bark peeled so as to leave the shavings still attached but curling back on it (Richards 1981: 123). Richards tells us that it is used as a decoration at festivals, and in particular, as a sign that head trophies have been acquired. It is also sent around to other longhouses, together with a feather and a piece of charred wood, as an urgent summons to war. The term *bungai* refers, of course, to a flower, while the word *jarau* means 'to prune', or 'lop branches from a tree' (Richards 1981: 123), and this would appear to indicate that we are again dealing with yet another reference to the idea of headhunting as the slashing of (palm) trees and the gathering of their fruit. This interpretation is supported by the fact that *bungai jarau* may also be known as *isang* (Richards 1981: 118, 123; see also n.5 above)

18. n.b. Freeman's observation that "[i]n Iban ritual invocation (*timang*), the prowess of their gods and culture heroes in felling immense and primordial trees is a recurrent theme" (1970: 174).

19. Cf. the *berayah* war dance performed around the *tiang kelingkang* earlier on in the festival (see pp. 347-348).

20. n.b. while on the one hand, women give birth to children of either sex, on the other, men may take the heads of both male and female victims.

21. n.b. it is interesting to note that among the neighbouring Kenyah, those who have lost their heads in battle are located in the same region of the afterworld as those women who have died in child birth.

22. Richards, in describing the Iban custom of piercing the glans penis with a pin or cross-piece (*palang*) of horn or ivory, mentions that "the lack of a *palang* may be adversely remarked upon by women", who will refer to the individual concerned as

being "unarmed" (*enda' betangkin*), or "with spear unsharpened" (*nadai utai tajam*) (1981: 245-46).

23. n.b. it is always the man who visits the girl and never the other way around.

24. Sandin translates the word *ngenang* (root - *kenang*) as "lovingly". Richards, however, translates the word as "remember, think of, pine for, ...'She wept to think of her mother who is dead...' He was sad (and) yearned for his own home' (1981: 154), therefore I think 'wistfully' is a better translation.

25. This sequence is referred to as 'wa' (Sandin 1977: 95). *Wa* literally means 'swing' as in *wa anak* - a cradle (Richards 1981: 415), and I suggest that in this instance the term *wa* may have connotations of a lullaby.

26. The spying sequence would appear to be omitted in Freeman's version and the representation of heads as infants is consequently to be found in the description of the flattery of Bengkong.

27. n.b. the *berayah* dance (see pp. 347-348)

28. This reference to the head as a "pointed red pepper" constitutes part of Freeman's evidence for a phallic interpretation of trophy heads (1979: 237).

29. n.b. in Nyuak's account of the reception of newly taken heads he tells us that following the procession of women
 "the oldest warrior of the village, with sword girded on, advances into the verandah and throws a quantity of rice onto the ground below, then drawing his sword, he performs the war-dance in the course of which he leaps three times over the pile of trophies and strikes his sword into a piece of wood placed conveniently for the purpose" (1977: 203).
 The suggestion here is that in this instance the "conveniently placed" piece of wood may in fact be a representation of the

mythical *ranyai* palm, and the war-dance again a portrayal of the gathering of its fruit - i.e. the taking of heads. One should also note the scattering of rice on the ground, in this connection.

30. n.b. in Sandin's transcription of a *sabak* funeral dirge, in the section where the party of the dead cuts down the fruit of the *ranyai* palms that grow in Sebayán, the women of the company are described as gathering up the fallen fruit (i.e. the heads) and carrying them back to the longhouse of the dead "on their hips" (1966: 69) - i.e. just as they would a small child. One should also note here that one of the varieties of blanket listed by Sandin as suitable for carrying a child is actually known by the title of *igi nibong* (1980: 86).

31. n.b. among the Ifugao of the Philippines, women ambush returning headhunting parties and compare the bravery of men in warfare with the far greater bravery of women in childbirth (Barton 1930: 169).

32. n.b. the similarities with the omen-bird's deception of Nising (see pp. 342-343).

33. Sather points out that unlike the *manang*'s performance of the *pelian bebunoh antu*, these encounters with *antu koklir* never take place. They are instead a collective male fantasy, usually reported as involving persons other than the story teller, or as some past events in which those involved are not identified (1978: 335). Consequently, the dire results of an *antu koklir* encounter are never actually experienced and exist only at the level of belief, unlike the effects of an *antu buyu* attack which are manifest in the very real tragedy of miscarriage and infant mortality.

34. *Antu koklir* stories do not always involve the death of the *koklir*, nevertheless the protective role of women is a common theme: the presence of a woman is always felt to have protective influence - rather similar to the presence of a *manang* - while it is women who pierce the hands and feet of women who have died in childbirth with thorns in order to prevent them from becoming *antu koklir* (Sather 1978b: 344).

35. One should of course note here Cohen's remarks as regards the possibility of ever 'resolving' what are essentially irreconcilable terms or points of view. He writes:
 "One should ... bear in mind that ... terms, like 'resolve', get over-loaded with meanings. No one can resolve the conflict between life and death (using the term 'resolve' in its non-logical sense) any more than he can resolve the binary opposition between them. Perhaps, however, people may get the feeling that they have, by a mental sleight of hand and aided by cultural devices, 'dealt' with the problem of life and death' (Cohen 1975: 622).
 Cohen adds: "one wonders how long the feeling actually lasts" (1975: 622).
36. n.b. Simpi Impang is to be distinguished from Simpang Impang the mother of Pulang Gana (see p. 287) (Richards 1981: 349). The term *simpi* means lopsided or one-sided, and refers to the fact that Simpi Impang is conceived as a unilateral figure (cf. Needham 1980, for an interesting discussion of unilateral figures in mythology)
37. There is an article in the Sarawak Museum Journal of 1955 which records the "mass excitement" in the Second Division at the discovery of rice growing on a sand bank in the river Rejang. This, it was thought, was a gift from Pulang Gana, and the scene was visited by thousands of Iban who hoped to secure some of this "sacred padi" (ie. *padi pun*) for themselves (Jamuh 1955).
38. n.b. one should of course note that it is the men who usually carry in the harvest grain, in this way identifying their own homecoming with that of the ripened rice.

CHAPTER IX.

COSMOLOGICAL TRANSITS AND THE MAINTENANCE OF SOCIETY

Introduction

In my last chapter I explored the Iban portrayal of a causal relationship between the taking of heads and the fertility of rice and women. In doing so I showed how the role of Iban men, as headhunters, can be systematically linked - by means of an elaborate set of metaphors and ritual identifications - to the circumstances of childbearing and rice cultivation such that the taking of heads is represented as a necessary precondition for the pregnancy of women and the increase of rice. This ritual significance of headhunting in relation to childbearing and agricultural production can be summed up in Aristotelian terms as one of entelechy. That is to say, it is the condition by which a potential becomes an actuality, in that it is the means by which the latent fecundity of women and rice is 'released' in a cycle of growth and development that ends, where it began, in a state of potential fertility embodied in the concept of maidenhood.

In this chapter I would like to pursue these ideas further, and show how they can be set against a cosmological background in which various changes of state or being are portrayed as different aspects of a process of ripening, or organic growth, and regeneration. This process can in fact be divided into two distinct spheres, or cycles, of development and reproduction which are brought together through the taking of heads. By this I mean that, on the one hand, we have headhunting depicted as the gathering of the fruits of the forest, and in particular that of the jungle palm *Oncosperma*¹; while on the other we have headhunting seen as a necessary precondition for the fertility of rice and women. The former, I shall argue, can be thought of as a 'wild' mode of production, and the latter as 'domestic', and I shall demonstrate how these ideas can ultimately be linked to a socio-centric model of the cosmos in which man and his society are seen as in some way set apart, or otherwise distinguished, from the wider world which encompasses them.

It is of course tempting to describe these native distinctions in terms of a Lévi-Straussian structural dichotomy between culture and nature. I shall, however, argue against the adoption of such a strategy - the categories of which are loaded with a plethora of implicit, and, I suspect, largely ethnocentric meanings - in favour of a more formal, and less value-laden, distinction between the realm of society and all it contains on the one hand, and everything that lies outside this domain on the other. In the particular case of the Iban material, the suggestion here is that the institution of headhunting can be thought of as crossing the divide between these two realms, providing a necessary link without which, it is implied, Iban society would atrophy and founder. That is to say that although the Iban may perceive themselves as being distinct, or

set apart, from the rest of creation, this separate existence or identity is not absolute, but is one that can only be maintained by periodically setting forth into remote and often hostile lands, with the aim of capturing and returning with the heads of those who inhabit these distant and alien regions. Such trophies, as we have seen, are as the fruit of the mythical *ranyai* palm, and as such are ritually depicted as replenishing the community's supply of seed. In this respect, the taking of heads is portrayed as an essential precondition for each new cycle of growth and development in the 'domestic' sphere of reproduction, and in terms of the logic of Iban collective representations it is clear that without this periodic injection of 'new life', then Iban society would soon cease to exist (c.f. the continuing importance of headhunting rituals in a modern context, despite the fact that the practice has been largely discontinued for several decades). This leads us to conclude that the traditional importance of Iban headhunting can ultimately be linked to a native perspective which sees the taking of heads as the principal means by which the continuity and integrity of society can be ensured².

Headhunting, society and the world 'out there'

As Freeman has pointed out, one of the key suppositions in the Iban identification of headhunting with fertility is the idea that trophy heads contain seed. It is in this respect that the taking of heads can be seen as supplying the longhouse community with the raw materials of reproduction - hence the special significance of this male institution in relation to the essentially female domain of childbearing and rice cultivation. The crucial issue that I wish to draw attention to here,

however, is that these seed-bearing 'fruit' - the *igi ranyai* of Iban mythology and oral literature - cannot be found locally, but must instead be acquired from elsewhere. This idea is clearly expressed in the ethnographic record and appears in a number of different contexts. For example, the stories of Keling and the heroes of Panggau Libau typically revolve around the theme of a journey into distant and unfamiliar lands³ where they enter into battle with demoniac spirits or the armies of despotic Malay chiefs⁴, only to return home in triumph with the heads of defeated enemies (Perham 1886: 265-288; Brooke-Low, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 326-337; Gomes 1911: 253; Sutlive 1977: 158-9). Similarly, the myths of Surong Gunting tell us that when Lang Sengalang Burong instructed his grandson in the art of warfare and headhunting he took him on a raid against an enemy who "lived on the horizon" (Howell 1977: 127). Then again, it will be recalled that in the chants accompanying headhunting festivals, the omen-birds seek their prize at the house of Nising, who is described as living at the edge of the yellow ...[and]... red sky (Sandin 1977: 90-91), ie. the horizon where the sun sets (or rises). In other words, one finds that the many references to headhunting in the Iban oral literature regularly turn on the idea of a journey into distant and unknown regions of the universe⁵.

This theme is of course very much a reflection of the situation that existed in real life, for in the past, Iban headhunting raids were traditionally directed outside the local area at distant enemies who were typically located beyond the mountains in the environs of another river valley. Thus Freeman defines the Iban 'tribe' as "a diffuse territorial grouping dispersed along the banks of a major river and its diverging tributaries ... *whose members did not take one another's heads*" (1970: 126;

my emphasis). Similarly, one learns that while personal animosities may have led to the occasional killing within the community, these were treated as cases of homicide and the victim's head was never taken (McKinley 1976: 108). In other words, Iban headhunting raids were always aimed at remote and largely unknown peoples situated beyond the borders of the Iban social universe, defined by the longhouse community and its neighbours.

Obviously there are a number of purely strategic and common sense reasons for directing raids far afield and not waging war on one's neighbours. Nevertheless I shall argue here that the fact that Iban men must venture into strange and foreign lands in their quest for trophy heads is actually of central importance to the whole idea of headhunting as a ritual activity in that the journey away from, and back to, the longhouse community can be seen as repeating the cosmological transits of the gods and heroes, as described in Iban mythology and oral literature.

To elaborate, McKinley has drawn attention to the socio-centric nature of many South East Asian cosmologies, where the village community - often that of a longhouse - is conceived as lying at the 'centre' of the universe, with the gods, spirits and other mythological figures located in the sky, beneath the earth, or in other peripheral zones that are situated either upriver towards the mountains of the interior, or else downstream towards the sea (1976: 103 ff.). The Iban can be included among those peoples who adhere to such a scheme for as we saw earlier, the spirits and demons (*antu*) of Iban mythology are traditionally associated with the depths of the forest (or else mountain tops, caves, the sea, and other areas not usually frequented by man), while the two most important deities - Lang Sengalang Burong and Pulang Gana - are respectively located in the

sky realm of Langit and the subterranean world of Raja Samerugah (see also Sutlive 1978: 1). In other words, the Iban, like many other South East Asian peoples, clearly draw a distinction between the village community and its immediate environs, on the one hand, and more distant regions of their physical universe, on the other. What is more, the latter realm - henceforth referred to as the world 'out there' - is regarded as the domain of the gods, spirits and other supernatural figures of the native pantheon. In this last respect one can argue that for the Iban, to make a journey away from the longhouse and its surrounding rice fields, is to venture into a semi-mythical landscape, and one that in places coincides with the geography of Iban legend and oral literature.

McKinley's main reason for pointing out this native introspection is in order to support his contention that headhunting can be conceived as a form of "reality maintenance" (1976: 109), whereby anomalous human beings are integrated into one's own society, thereby sustaining the credibility of a socio-centric cosmology that denies the humanity of other peoples living beyond the borders of the longhouse territory. Briefly, McKinley's thesis rests on the argument that headhunting raids were traditionally directed against distant enemies who, while they bore obvious resemblances to other human beings, nevertheless were regarded as inhabiting unearthly and in-human regions of the universe by virtue of their peripheral location in a socio-centric cosmos. He writes:

"Implicit in this whole frame of reference is the notion that other human communities are slightly beyond the pale. They are in the realm where spirits dwell and therefore cannot be viewed as humans on the same basis as the members of one's own community" (1976: 107).

The existence of these 'non-human' human beings evidently creates a cosmological paradox, and in this respect the peoples of distant tribes with alien cultural traditions can be understood as posing a "phenomenological threat" to one's own society and culture (1976: 109). This threat can only be removed by travelling to these peripheral zones and removing the heads of their inhabitants - the head, or more accurately, the face upon it, being seen here as the symbol of "social personhood" (1976: 118) - which are then brought back to the longhouse where they are welcomed and ritually integrated into society as 'proper' human beings. In other words, the argument here is that headhunting should be seen as a means of ironing out the demographic inconsistencies in a socio-centric view of the cosmos, and according to McKinley, it is this notion which underlies the connection between headhunting and fertility for were these procedures not carried out, then the universe would be thrown into disorder causing the natural processes of reproduction to be disrupted - hence the failure of crops and the infertility of women.

Elegant though the argument may seem at first glance, this interpretation of headhunting rests upon a number of theoretical presuppositions about the nature of 'order' and the importance that is attached to it in societies other than our own. In particular it relies heavily on the notion of "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966). The questions that are raised or are implicit in this position are most profound and relate to indigenous systems of classification and epistemological categories. These are issues that are not properly covered by McKinley, nor is he able to explain the profusion of organic images

that are associated with headhunting in Iban oral literature and ritual discourse. As Freeman himself observes in introducing his own account of Iban headhunting: "[i]nterpretations such as these give comfort, I suppose, to some [but] for me they have the defect of totally failing to detect any breath of the symbolism integral to the [Iban] cult of head-hunting" (1979: 233-34).

But while McKinley's analysis may be flawed in several important respects, he does, however, raise two interesting issues -- namely the socio-centric nature of many South East Asian cosmologies and the fact that headhunting -- as a ritual activity -- can be investigated in terms of this indigenous perspective. Thus McKinley, following Downs (1955: 47 ff), points out that headhunting myths in South East Asia are often constructed around the theme of a cosmological journey (1976: 101), and that in this respect there is evidently "a close parallel between the headhunting expeditions of the legendary heroes and transits back and forth between distant and unseen, even unearthly, parts of the universe" (1976: 101).

McKinley's remarks are of particular interest to us here in that as we have seen, a similar theme can also be discerned in the Iban material. In this respect, one should note the possible connection between the words *kayo*, meaning to wander, and *kayu*, meaning to make war, or to go on the warpath (Richards 1981: 142). At the same time it should also be pointed out that the term *jelai*, meaning far off or distant, when used as a verb (*nyeli*), is translated as meaning to cut the top off or behead (Richards 1981: 125)⁶. Most important of all, however, is the Iban description of a total stranger -- i.e. someone who is not only personally unknown, but who also comes from foreign parts and so is unlikely to be related, even

remotely, by cognatic ties of kinship (see p. 74-76) - as *orang bukai* (Freeman 1970: 69).

The term *bukai* is translated in the Iban dictionaries as meaning 'other' or 'another', and *orang bukai* as meaning 'other people' - ie. aliens (Howell & Bailey 1900: 28; Richards 1981: 53). McKinley, however, suggests that *bukai* can in actual fact be related to the Malay word *bukan*, meaning no or negative (1976: 108). This is quite possible in that the Malay and Iban languages are indeed very closely related (Richards 1981: ix), and that many Malay words ending in *-an* are transposed to *-ai* in Iban (eg the Malay word *jalan*, meaning way, path or road, becomes *jalai* in Iban, as in the term *bejalai* to travel). If this is so in the case of *bukai*, then *orang bukai* can be roughly translated as meaning "people negated" or "people who are not people" (McKinley 1976: 108), which of course agrees with McKinley's argument that the distant enemy, whose heads were taken, were thought of, or at least classified, as being somehow 'inhuman'. Against this background one can therefore argue that Iban headhunters were indeed seen as following in the footsteps of the gods and legendary heroes, who must venture into remote and unearthly regions of the universe to do battle with the demoniac spirits (*antu*) who inhabit these parts, thereby securing the precious 'fruit' of the *ranyai* palm upon whose acquisition the future of society depends.

This latter claim is supported by the fact that the Iban term for a head trophy is *antu pala*, or 'head *antu*'. As I pointed out earlier, *antu* are normally located in extra or non-social areas of the Iban universe such as caves, mountains and the depths of the forest (Perham 1882: 215-17; Beccari 1904: 52; Gomes 1911: 198-201; Freeman 1970: 199; Jensen 1974: 95; Sather 1978b: 313, 315). In particular one finds that *antu* are

especially associated with stories of being lost or alone in the jungle, and with attacks by snakes and other wild denizens of the forest which are seen as the manifestation of *antu* in corporeal form (Jensen 1974: 95)⁷. In this respect they can therefore be said to resemble in some ways the enemy whose heads the Iban seek to capture. By this I mean that *antu*, as the inhabitants of the forest and other wild places, can be regarded as loitering malevolently on the periphery of the Iban world, just as the enemy in real life awaits 'out there', posing a physical and, for McKinley at least, a phenomenological threat to the future security of Iban society. In short, the suggestion here is that in certain lights *antu* and the enemy can be understood as being synonymous with one another,⁸ and one should note in this connection that Jensen actually mentions that in Iban hepatomancy by pig's liver, the lobe that is normally associated with the activities of *antu* may on occasion be alternatively identified with the enemy (1974: 138, n.2).

Pursuing these ideas further one can argue that in particular the enemy can be identified with *antu gerasi* - demoniac huntsmen of gigantic proportions who roam the forests with their hounds (*pasun*) to prey upon the lives of human beings whom they subsequently eat (Perham 1882: 216; Howell & Bailey 1900: 52; Howell 1977: 21-22, 172; Freeman 1970: 199; Jensen 1974: 102; Richards 1981: 104). Richards suggests as much when he writes that "*antu gerasi* may represent the former inhabitants of areas invaded by Iban, who would have been of strange appearance, probably with animal fangs in their ears, and whose local knowledge and forest skills would have made them fearsome" (1981: 104)⁹. What is more, one finds that Nising, who as the tutelary spirit of trophy heads can himself be identified with the enemy, is portrayed in the oral literature as a

gigantic being with eyes as wide as cups, and ears as large as winnowing baskets, whose breath roars like a blacksmith's anvil while his teeth grind like the hammering of steel (Sandin 1977: 108-111. 191 n51)¹⁹, which agrees closely with Gomes' description of an *antu gerasi* as a supernatural being "who, when seen, takes the form of a giant about three times the size of a man, is covered with rough shaggy hair, and has eyes as big as saucers and huge glittering teeth" (1911: 199). One also finds that Tisi Langit (lit. 'the edge of the sky'), where Nising is said to reside (see above), is at the same time identified as the realm of *antu gerasi* (Sandin 1966: 24-25, 45; Sather 1981: 94 n8).

In summary then, the ethnographic evidence strongly suggests that, for the Iban, their enemies, whose heads they took, were traditionally conceived as being like the malevolent and demoniac *antu* who roam the forests and prey upon the lives of the unwary. If nothing else they both belong to the same realm - that of the world 'out there' - a largely unknown and potentially hazardous region, that lies beyond the familiar boundaries of the longhouse and the surrounding countryside. So one finds that, on the one hand, remote strangers from distant lands are described by the Iban as 'non-people' (*orang bukat*) - which can be interpreted as a reference to their peripheral, and hence 'inhuman', location in a socio-centric universe - while on the other, the heads that are removed from the shoulders of such persons are themselves quite explicitly identified as *antu*. The suggestion here then, is that Iban warfare can in this light be seen as a re-enactment of the mythical exploits of the gods and heroes whose legendary battles with demoniac *antu gerasi* at the edge of the universe provide an ever-popular dramatic motif in Iban oral literature. That is to say that Iban headhunting raids, which traditionally penetrated

deep into enemy territory, are perhaps best understood when set against a cosmological background, and that those who took part in them may be seen as having followed in the footsteps of the gods and legendary heroes who are themselves, in Iban mythology and ritual invocation, described as journeying to the very edge of the horizon in their search for the precious fruit of the *ranyai* palm.

Palms trees, fruit and society

I would like at this point to return to our earlier discussion of the imagery of fruit and palm trees (chapter 8), and to consider some further implications of these themes in the light of our present findings as regards the cosmological significance of Iban headhunting raids. As we have seen, Iban trophy heads are regularly described in the oral literature as fruit of one variety or another, while combat and decapitation are depicted as the pollarding of the mythical *nibong* palm (*Oncosperma* spp.), known as the *ranyai*. The fruit of the latter (*igi ranyai*), when brought back to the longhouse and cut open in the rites of *ngelempang*, are found to contain all kinds of seed, but most importantly that of the 'sacred' rice, *padi pun*. In this light then, the collective representation of trophy heads as fruit can clearly be linked to the idea that they contain seed, but I shall argue below that this imagery can also be linked to another set of associations which draw their inspiration from a collective social 'memory' of an earlier time when the distant ancestors of the Iban lived in the jungle as hunter-gatherers, subsisting, quite literally, on the fruits of the forest.

To elaborate, the Iban often pass comment as to the fact that their remote predecessors lived in the jungle in a 'wild' state, like the nomadic Punan of today who do not cultivate crops but must instead rely upon the natural resources of the forest to satisfy their daily needs (Jensen 1974: 151). In this respect, one can argue that the deeds of Iban men as headhunters may, in certain lights, be seen as emulating the traditional way of life of their ancestors before they became rice farmers, in that the taking of heads is itself portrayed as the gathering of a harvest of wild fruit - in particular, that of the wild jungle palm *Oncosperma* (above). This idea is supported by the fact that the edible heart, or 'cabbage' (*upa*), of the *nibong* palm, when used in a ritual context at major festivals, is said to "symbolize life before *padi* was sown" (Richards 1981: 235, 414). In other words, the suggestion here is that the gathering of palm fruit can, in ritual terms, be related to an archaic, or 'pre-social', stage of being - one that was subsequently superseded by the adoption of rice farming as a way of life.

But if the collective representation of headhunting as the gathering of fruit evokes an earlier, pre-social, state of being, in another context, the taking of heads can be seen as an instrumental factor in bringing about a state of society, or culture, for the fruit that is brought back from the warpath contains rice seed, and rice farming, as we have seen, is held up by the Iban as the most important single feature or characteristic of their traditional way of life. Evidently, what we are dealing with here are two different modes, or cycles, of production - the one 'wild', being based on the gathering of the fruits of the forest; the other 'domestic' being based on the cultivation of rice. These two domains, though clearly distinguished, are nevertheless joined together by the fact that the fruit

of the mythical *ranyai* palm is portrayed as containing rice seed. That is to say, the realm of rice cultivation ultimately coincides with the palm cycle which is understood to be the source of all seed. And it is, of course, headhunting which facilitates the movement from one domain to the other.

Rice farming is claimed by the Iban as the definitive feature of their way of life, while fruit gathering looks back to a pre-Iban past, and it is inviting in this context to set this distinction against a Lévi-Straussian dichotomy between nature and culture, whereby the movement from the sphere of fruit gathering to that of rice growing can be seen as tracing the transition from a pre-social state of 'nature', as represented by the hunter-gatherer economy of the Punan, to one of 'culture', based upon the cultivation of rice. In this light, the institution of headhunting can be thought of not only as responsible for bringing about the fertility of rice and women, but at the same time as instrumental in establishing the boundary between Iban society and the realm of nature. Such an interpretation, however, begs a very important question, namely the very idea of nature itself. By this I mean that while Iban attitudes towards rice farming may perhaps be legitimately linked to an indigenous notion of society, or 'culture', the term 'nature' cannot be so readily dispensed. That is to say, it is an unwarranted inference to suppose that Iban ideas of nature, and what is 'natural' in the world, should correspond with our own, often multiple definitions of the term. For this reason then, it is perhaps better if in this instance we adopt a Hobbesian view of nature as the "non-social" element of human experience, where, in Collingwood's words, the term " 'nature' stands ... for the negative partner in a pair of correlative terms, the positive partner here being 'society', and 'society'

being understood as a state into which men put themselves by doing something to themselves which the civilians call entering into a social contract" (Collingwood 1971: 258).

This idea of nature as the negative partner in a pair of correlative terms in which the other is society, obviously corresponds with certain aspects of Lévi-Strauss's implementation of the distinction between nature and culture as an analytical device. It does not, however, require that we make any assumptions as regards the native definition of nature, other than it is that which lies outside the realm of society, or what is to be considered to be social. In this respect, nature is defined, not so much in its own terms, but rather in relation to society. In this particular instance we can include the notion of 'wild' (as opposed to 'domesticated') under the general heading of nature, and this can be equated with a pre-social state of being, much as in our own understanding of the term. One should not infer from this, however, that other aspects of the Iban view of the non-social, or a-social, universe, necessarily corresponds with our own ideas of nature and what is natural in the world.

The distinction between 'wild' and 'domesticated' is an interesting one, and can of course be readily incorporated into our earlier discussion of the socio-centric nature of Iban cosmology. In this connection, one should note the special significance of the palm tree as a metaphorical representation of the non-social. By this I mean that the palm tree, as an image, can be thought of as exemplifying the world 'out there', in that palm trees are 'of the jungle' - where they grow wild and unaided by the assistance of man - and in this respect they embody all that is non-social. Conversely, rice may be thought of as embodying all that is

social, in that it must be cultivated - it requires human intervention - and furthermore, in the case of Iban agriculture, it is surrounded by all kinds of ritual prescriptions and mythological associations which locate it firmly within the domain of society.

These views are of course reflected in the Iban idea of their earliest, and not-yet-fully-Iban, predecessors as living in ignorance of the knowledge of rice cultivation, subsisting instead upon the fruits of the jungle (above). It is therefore interesting to note in this connection that the Iban often refer to their remote ancestors as being 'like *antu*' (*baka antu*) (Jensen 1974: 15), for here one finds that a *temporal* distinction between pre-social and social stages in Iban ethnogenesis has been transposed onto a *spatial* distinction between social and non-social realms of the universe (c.f. my earlier discussion of the term *antu*). With the acquisition of rice and the knowledge of rice farming, however, these forefathers of the Iban people moved to the 'centre' - they became social - and hence set themselves apart from the rest of creation.

Without wishing to become too embroiled at this point in a hypothetical account of Iban ethnogenesis it will be apparent that the first rice must initially have come to them from elsewhere, most probably through the exchange of jungle produce with early Chinese traders who settled along the west coast of Borneo between the 10th and the 13th centuries (Harrisson & O'Connor 1968: 49; Morgan 1968: 161; Christie 1985: 82). These historical circumstances are 'recognized' in Iban mythology, which repeatedly tells of the journey of a heroic figure into remote and even unearthly regions inhabited by the gods and spirits whose wisdom on some aspects of the rice cycle he subsequently imparts to his fellow men upon his return home. For example, we learn of how Simpi Impang acquired

the first rice seed from Bunsu Tikus (or Ini Raja Pipit) whilst wandering in the depths of the forest (Sandin 1957: 119 ff.; Perham, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 301; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 262; Jensen 1966: 19-20; 1974: 76-78; Sather 1980a: 69). Similarly, Pulang Gana gains his ownership of the soil, and with it the knowledge of the correct preparations to make prior to planting, from Raja Samerugah after having followed a mysterious porcupine through a tunnel in the mountains to his subterranean kingdom beneath Gunong Chiping (Perham 1881: 146-7; Gomes 1911: 300-15; Harrisson 1965: 36-37; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 261-62; Jensen 1974: 78-81; Sutlive 1978: 100; Richards 1981: 288-89). Then again, Surong Gunting learns the proper sequence of omens and other necessary ritual procedures connected with rice farming during his sojourn in the sky realm of Lang Sengalang Burong (Perham 1882: 237-40; Howell 1977: 125-28; Gomes 1911: 278-300; Richards 1972: 67; 1981: 357-58; Jensen 1974: 84-90; Sandin 1980: 101-104). He also acquires an understanding of lunar and stellar movements and how they may be used in relation to the timing of the agricultural cycle from the moon and the Pleiades sisters whom he encounters in the course of a second journey to the heavens (Jensen 1974: 88; Sandin 1980: 101-2; Sather 1980a: 69; Richards 1981: 357-58). In short, the knowledge of rice cultivation - and, for that matter, many other areas of Iban social and cultural life (see below) - is regularly identified in the oral literature as having been initially gained from 'out there', most usually via communication with the gods.

But if the historical circumstances surrounding the Iban adoption of rice farming can be linked to mythological accounts of the adventures of Iban cultural heroes, one can argue that the collective representation of headhunting as procuring rice seed can similarly be identified with the

initial stages in the development of an agricultural economy. That is to say that Iban men, bringing back the 'fruit' of the *ranyai* palm from the world 'out there', can be seen as re-enacting the very first introduction of rice, which precipitated the move from a pre-social state of being to one of society and culture (see p. 423). In this light, the taking of heads is presented as being instrumental in bringing about the existence of Iban society in the first place.

At this point I would like to draw attention to an interesting variation on the theme of a fabulous fruit tree, growing in some remote region of the Iban mythical universe. I refer in this instance to the legendary Pauh Laba tree, whose branches are said to bring forth precious metals, jars, silks, beads, charms and other exotic items of material or ritual value (Brooke-Low, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 332; Anonymous 1977: 274; Richards 1981: 108). This imagery can of course be readily linked to the custom of *bejalai*, or travelling abroad, which is the passion of every young Iban male (see p. 92-93). That is to say that the extraordinary fruit of the Pauh Laba tree can clearly be identified with the wealth and exotica that every young man hopes to bring back from his sojourn in foreign lands, and as Harrisson & Sandin record, to dream of this marvellous tree is a sure sign of forthcoming good fortune and prosperity (1966: 206-7). At the same time, however, the idea of the Pauh Laba tree can be simultaneously linked to the mythical *ranyai* palm, whose fruits are gathered by Iban headhunters; indeed Richards actually mentions that in some instances they are said to be one and the same tree (1981: 108; 170; 378-9)¹¹

This correspondence, or overlap, is perhaps best seen in the myth of Limbang, Keling's youngest brother. Briefly, this story revolves around

the disappearance of Limbang while on a hunting expedition with his brothers in the deep jungle (Brooke-Low, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 328-332; Anonymous 1977: 264-75; Richards 1981: 108). This expedition has taken them far from home for we are told that the brothers had equipped themselves with provisions in case they strayed into an "unknown region", and that they "fully intended to make a long business of it, and be absent for days and weeks" (Anonymous 1977: 264). During this time, Limbang had continually surprised his brothers with feats of strength and endurance, even though he was the youngest of the five. It so happened, however, that despite his remarkable abilities, Limbang becomes separated from his elder siblings and lost his way in the depths of the forest. There he encountered a giant ogre by the name of Gua who nevertheless belied his fearsome appearance by befriending him and inviting him to stay at his house. Gua lived alone, having eaten the other members of his community, and as he had no heir, he therefore decided to adopt Limbang as his son. Thus it came about that Limbang stayed with his strange benefactor a number of years, during which time he married the daughter of a celestial shaman, and proved himself on the field of battle by overcoming an army of Malay and tribal warriors single-handed.

Meanwhile, back in Panggau Libau, Limbang's disappearance and long absence had led his brothers and family to give him up for dead. It is, however, Gua who eventually dies in the story - after gorging himself on the bodies of Limbang's slain enemies - and it is in the nature of his demise that our interest lies. We are told that as he lay on his death bed, Gua issued instructions that he should be interred at the foot of his house ladder:

"A few days after he gave up the ghost and was buried; but his head would not remain under ground, it broke cover and split, and out of the fissure grew a young sapling, which gradually swelled out into a gigantic Embawang tree, of which the boughs were of iron and steel; the fruit, jars of ancient manufacture; the blossoms that fell, turned into rare old beads; and the leaves that strewed the ground, turned into silks and satins" (Anonymous 1977: 274; see also Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896 I: 332; Richards 1981: 108).

Shortly after this remarkable germination of Gua's head, the house where he once lived - with Limbang and his wife inside - was swept away by a great flood, and when the waters finally subsided, Limbang found that they had come to rest at none other than Panggau Libau, his childhood home. There everyone rejoiced at his miraculous return, for they had thought him long dead, while Limbang in his turn was able to present them with fabulous gifts and treasures which he had acquired from the marvellous tree that had emerged from the half-buried head of his late, adoptive father.

The idea of a tree whose branches are of iron and steel, and whose fruit and blossoms turn into jars, beads, silks, and so forth, can readily be identified with the legendary Pauh Laba tree and the institution of *bejalai*. On the other hand, Limbang's participation in a hunting expedition, his encounter with an *antu gerasi* - for this is what Gua really is (see pp. 419-420) - and the imagery of sprouting heads and heroic battles can equally be related to headhunting and the theme of the mythical *ranyai* palm¹². Indeed one actually finds that trophy heads may occasionally be referred to as *buah embawang* - i.e. the fruit of the *embawang* tree (Richards 1981: 76) - which, it will be recalled, is the type of tree which is said to have emerged from the head of Gua¹³. In this

respect, it seems evident that the story of Limbang can be linked, not only to the custom of *bejalai*, but also to Iban headhunting practices, and that these two spheres of activity can, in certain lights, be seen as transformations of one another, in the Lévi-Straussian sense of the term.

Obviously, there are a number of immediate parallels that one can draw between the two institutions. To begin with, they both revolve around the idea of young men embarking on a long journey away from the community, only to return - it is hoped - in triumph with some kind of trophy such as a valuable item of property or, of course, a human head. Such an achievement in both instances brings great prestige and honour to the individual concerned, and is subsequently marked in later life by the sponsorship of a celebratory festival or *gawai*. Indeed it appears that *bejalai* ceremonies have actually evolved out of the cycle of headhunting *gawai* held by those who have taken enemies heads. Thus Freeman tells us that "after having accomplished many successful journeys ... a man begins the performance of the series of elaborate rituals (all based on the institution of headhunting) which confer social prestige in middle and old age" (1970: 223). In short one finds, as Jensen himself has observed, that

"[p]resent-day *bejalai* is interpreted in many respects as the equivalent of head-hunting expeditions in the past [although] [o]ther trophies have taken the place of heads: valuable jars and gongs, and even outboard engines" (Jensen 1974: 51).

The important thing to realize here, however, is that this evident congruity between Iban headhunting and the custom of *bejalai* is not restricted simply to their similarity as social institutions, but can also

be discerned in the ritual or mystical significance that is attributed to these two pursuits.

The nature of the exotic

I have argued that in terms of Iban cosmology, to travel into foreign lands that lie beyond the frontiers of the longhouse territory is to venture into a quasi mythical zone frequented by the gods, spirits and other supernatural beings. In such circumstances, it would seem likely that any object or article brought back from this realm will be looked upon as possessing extraordinary properties or attributes. The Iban reverence for trophy heads is of course the most obvious expression of such an attitude, but I shall argue here that other foreign or imported items may also be imbued with a certain mystical or magical significance. That is to say that while the 'fruits' of *bejalai* expeditions bring their own rewards simply in terms of the material benefits and prestige that are attached to their acquisition, one frequently finds that the various treasures that are brought back from the world 'out there' may also be endowed with special qualities or properties that extend beyond their purely economic or functional utility.

Perhaps the best example of this Iban mystification of the exotic is provided by their attitude towards antique Chinese storage jars (*tajau*), which are greatly admired, and which are the most highly prized of all *bejalai* trophies. Jars such as these are referred to as *benda* - which is a classificatory term that describes moveable property which is of ritual value (Richards 1981: 40; 360) - and Harrisson & Sandin inform us that the acquisition of at least one of these exotic vessels is "indispensable" to

the assumption of the honorific title of *raja brani* (see p. 94), irrespective of how many heads an individual may have taken (1966: 188). The important point to note here, however, is that jars such as these are frequently said to be inhabited by *antu* (Freeman 1970: 226; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 187), whose attributes are remarkably like those of head trophies or *antu pala*. For example, Harrisson & Sandin write that although

"[t]hese are not general or mobile spirits, with any outside junction. Nevertheless, they have considerable and positive powers, mainly in the direction of assisting the owner, helping him to get more wealth, good crops, anything of excellent fortune" (1966: 187).

The authors add that "[b]ecause of this, the truly religious Ibans frequently make offerings on top of jars, covered with *pua* blankets, waved over with a cock and prayers (*sampi*), for general good fortune, health etc" (1966: 187). They also mention that such jars should be "oiled regularly, as a form of politeness and respect" (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 187), which recalls the reverential treatment of trophy heads which are periodically 'fed' and provided with tobacco and chewing ingredients (Brooke-Low 1892: 59; Howell 1977: 137; Gomes 1911: 213; Basil 1949: 59). What is more, one finds that recently acquired jars - like newly taken heads - are ceremonially received with a festival, the *gawai tajau*, at which they are 'blessed' (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 187). One also learns that the term *segiau*, which is an alternative for *tajau* may be employed in a 'poetic sense' to denote trophy heads (Richards 1981: 329; see for example Georgie 1959: 23), which are sometimes also referred to in the verses of Iban

headhunting chants as "precious ornaments" (Perham 1878: 130). In short, it is possible to draw a number of parallels between, on the one hand, the jars that are acquired in the course of *bejalai* expeditions, and on the other, the head trophies that are brought back from the war path; furthermore that this association is on occasion quite explicit, taking the form of a metaphorical substitution of one term for the other.

The special, even mystical, regard for foreign artefacts and other exotica is also apparent in the fact that *bejalai* expeditions are frequently associated with the acquisition of magical charms and other items of ritual value. For example, unusual strains of rice procured during the course of travels abroad may subsequently be incorporated into a family's selection of sacred rice (*padi sangking*) and may even be adopted as *padi pun* (Uchibori: private communication). Other charms and ritual accessories may also be acquired in this way (Sather 1980a: 89), while the custom of holding a night vigil (*nampok*) at some remote location in the jungle or mountains in the hope of gaining a talisman from a benign *antu* can similarly be seen as a reflection of this underlying notion.

At this point, I would like to pause for a moment and consider, briefly, the special importance of iron in Iban society and culture. I do so because the acquisition of an iron technology, like the adoption of rice, can in many respects be regarded as critical to the emergence of an Iban cultural tradition, while at the same time exemplifying Iban attitudes towards the exotic as a source of mystical 'power', or benefits. To elaborate, I mentioned earlier that the Iban shaman, or *manang*, is always given a small piece of iron or steel (*besi*) in return for his professional service. This is in order to 'strengthen' (*ngering*) his *semangat* against the hazards that he may encounter in the course of his travels in the

supernatural realm, and a similar theme can be discerned in other ritual contexts. For example, the bards (*lemembang*) who perform the incantations (*pengap/timang*) that invoke the presence of the gods at a festival, are themselves protected in this way from the potentially harmful consequences of their actions (Sandin 1962: 408). So too is the man responsible for washing and oiling the ritual whetstones at a *gawai batu*, or whetstone festival (below). In this instance, the individual concerned is described as biting upon a knife (Sandin 1962: 397), and as wearing a bracelet of iron (Jensen 1974: 197). Female specialists who prepare the mordants used in dyeing are also said to clench a knife between their teeth (Howell 1912: 64), while we are told that an abortionist receives a piece of iron in order to "steel her against the possible consequences" (Jensen 1967: 168). Furthermore, the fines (*sigi alas*) that are imposed for transgressions of the *adat* - which, it will be recalled, are as much a ritual matter as they are one of social concern - must include a metal object in order to compensate for the damages incurred by the *semengat* of the injured party (Sandin 1962: 392; Sather 1980a: 93; 1980b: xxix). In short, one finds that the imagery of iron and steel plays an important role in Iban ritual discourse where they are seen to 'strengthen' the *semengat* against mystical attack or injury¹⁴.

Pursuing the imagery of iron and steel further, one comes across the deity Selampandai, who is depicted in mythology as a divine blacksmith whose task it is to forge new generations of Iban men and women on his anvil beside a mountain of glowing coals (Perham 1881: 145; Howell & Bailey 1900: 151; Howell 1977: 20; Gomes 1911: 174; 197; Basil 1949: 60; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 121; Richards 1981: 332)¹⁵. In this capacity he is often called upon in the course of healing ceremonies to re-cast, or re-

shape, the bodies of those who are ill (Howell & Bailey 1900: 149; Gomes 1911: 174; Basil 1949: 60; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 110), and a similar theme appears in the verses of a *sabak* funeral dirge, which describe the deceased as being like "an old piece of iron which has lost its temper" (Sandin 1966: 43).

It is evident then, that iron is "deeply involved in the figurative and esoteric aspects of Iban culture" (Morgan 1968: 160). What is of particular interest to us in this instance, however, is that while the Iban may well be able blacksmiths, they do not themselves mine iron ore, but must instead obtain their raw materials from the world that lies beyond the boundaries of Iban society - most commonly as an exchange for rice and jungle produce. In this respect one should note that the boughs of the fabulous Pauh Laba tree are actually said to be of iron and steel, which can be seen, not only as a reflection of the crucial importance of these materials - both in ritual and economic terms (see below) - but also as registering their exogeneous origins in the world 'out there'.

At this point I would like to consider, if only for a moment, the tremendous impact that the introduction of iron must have had upon the development of an agrarian economy in the equatorial rain forests of north east Borneo. According to Iban tradition, their earliest ancestors lived in the jungle as hunters and gatherers up until the time of Surong Gunting and the discovery of rice farming, headhunting and the other major institutions that characterize Iban society and culture as we know it today (see p. 425). Of course no precise date can be given to this moment of Iban ethnogenesis, but it is not too fanciful to suggest that the changes referred to above may have been precipitated by the advent of an iron-age revolution in the region. By this I mean that one can trace the

origins of metallurgy in Borneo back to the beginning of the tenth century with the emergence of the mercantile state of Po-ni at Santubong and other trading ports along the west coast (Morgan 1968: 160; Christie 1985). In the case of Santubong itself, archaeological evidence reveals that great quantities of iron ore were smelted here between 1100 and 1350 (Harrison & O'Connor 1968; Morgan 1968 160-61; Christie 1985: 82), and as Morgan has remarked "Ivlyery probably the basic Iban changes were contemporaneous with this industry which traded iron ore (and ceramics) deep into the jungle for the produce that China desired: among which was gold" (1968: 161)¹⁶

I have already referred to the special regard for ceramic wares in traditional Iban culture, but at the time of which we are speaking it would have been the introduction of iron which played a far greater and more dramatic role in the development of Iban society and agriculture. By this I mean that if nothing else, the emergence of an iron-age technology allowed, for the first time, the large scale exploitation of the land, in that the use of metal tools enabled substantial areas of the jungle to be cleared for the planting of rice (Freeman 1970: 174-5).

One must of course be cautious in making historical inferences. For instance, one should note that an absence of iron does not necessarily preclude the cultivation of rice - it has been suggested that some swamp rice (*payah*) may have been planted by the inhabitants of low-lying areas (Morgan 1968: 161). Nevertheless, it not unreasonable to assume that by far the greater part of the indigenous Bornean population would have subsisted as hunters and gatherers before the advent of iron, much as the Punan and other nomadic tribes still do today. Accordingly, one can therefore argue that the appearance of iron in the twelfth century must

have totally transformed the traditional way of life for many Bornean peoples including, it is suggested, that of the Iban.

Whatever the precise historical circumstances surrounding the Iban acquisition of an iron-age technology, the importance of this metal in the lives of contemporary Iban, and those of their predecessors for several hundred years, is undeniable. Some idea of this is revealed in the words of a *sabak* dirge which describes the post-mortem fate of aborted fetuses (*anak lulus*) in the Iban after world. As I mentioned in my introduction to the ethnography, those who die from extraordinary causes such as drowning or suicide are allocated special departments or *menoa* of the Iban afterworld, and in the case of the aborted fetus we are told that it is "the poorest of all creatures [for] when it dies, it has not been given by its parents a piece of iron, and therefore has nothing to use to farm secondary jungle" (Sandin 1966: 40). That the aborted fetus does not receive a gift of iron from its parents obviously relates to the fact that the fetus is not given a proper burial with grave goods (*baya*) and so forth. The reference to secondary jungle (*damun*) on the other hand relates to the fact that the undergrowth (*baba*) in areas that have been cleared before is far more luxuriant and dense than it is in primary forest where the mature arboreal canopy prevents much of the sunlight from reaching the forest floor. In this context the use of field-knives (*duku*) and other metal implements in clearing the land for rice fields is at even more of a premium than would otherwise be the case in virgin forest and the suggestion is that the specific reference to secondary jungle in this instance can be interpreted as an implicit recognition of the vital role of metal tools in the swidden cultivation of hill rice.

A similar theme can also be discerned in the ritual significance of whetstones in relation to Iban agricultural practices. Each *bilek*-family has in its possession a ritual whetstone, or *batu pemanggol*, which ranks alongside *ubat jedian* and *padi pun* in terms of its importance in relation to the family's farming activities. These ritual whetstones play a central role in the rites of *manggol* which inaugurate the rice cycle each year (Freeman 1970: 173; Jensen 1974: 166-67; Richards 1981: 250), and at the same time they are themselves the subject of a major festival - the *gawai batu* (lit, 'stone festival') (Perham 1881: 147-48; Howell 1977: 100-3; Gomes 1911: 215; Sandin 1962; Richards 1981: 97). The latter are held only periodically - usually in response to a succession of poor harvests or a famine - and on such occasions the ritual whetstones are ceremonially washed and oiled, while "a blessing is asked upon the stones that they may make the implements sharp for cutting down the jungle" (Howell 1977: 100). The accompanying chants also call upon the deities - in particular Pulang Gana and the gods of fortune - to lend their divine assistance in the coming agricultural season and those that follow, and in this respect the *gawai batu* has been described as among the most important of all Iban festivals "since it is aimed at refreshing the whole rice cycle and re-grading the Iban economy so fully based on the rice fields (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 241). What is of particular interest to us here, is that their ritual importance can ultimately be related to the vital role of metal implements in the development and continuing practice of swidden cultivation.

In summary then, metal tools and implements have, for centuries, played a central role in Iban daily life¹⁷ and are of crucial importance in relation to the swidden cultivation of hill rice. Indeed one can

reasonably argue that the adoption of rice farming as the principal means of subsistence could only have been brought about with the acquisition of metallurgy and an iron-age technology. The main point that I wish to make here, however, is that as a raw material iron ore (or pig iron), is not an indigenous product; rather it is something that must be imported into Iban society from the world 'out there'. In this light one can therefore argue that while the ritual significance of iron and steel can on the one hand be linked to their special importance for Iban rice farming (and warfare), it can, on the other, be seen as another instance of a more general attitude whereby exotic 'goods' that are brought back from beyond the frontiers of the longhouse territory, are imbued with special qualities and attributes that extend beyond their purely physical or material properties.

For the Iban, then, the world 'out there' is a source of all kinds of benefits or advantages, be they heads, slaves, rice, seed, magical charms, precious metals, ceramics, silks, or whatever. These benefits are depicted in the oral literature as the wild fruit of the forest, growing on fabulous trees that are located in some remote region of the cosmos. Like other forms of jungle produce, this fruit crop may be periodically harvested, thereby bringing fertility, prosperity and well-being generally to the longhouse community. In this respect it is apparent that while Iban cosmology may differentiate between the realm of man and his society, on the one hand, and the quasi-mythical regions that lie beyond on the other, it nevertheless requires that a certain degree of interaction or exchange take place between the two domains in order that the continuity of Iban society be assured. Indeed one can even argue that it is this continuing interaction between the two spheres that lies at the very heart of Iban

existence in that it plays upon a most fundamental set of distinctions between self and other; Iban and non-Iban; social and non-social; domestic and wild; which together both establish *and* maintain the Iban way of life as a distinct cultural tradition.

Longhouses, hornbills and the dependency of women

An important point that arises from the above discussion is that it is of course *men* who are ultimately responsible for bringing about and perpetuating this state of affairs. That is to say, it is men who venture out into the world beyond the longhouse territory, and who bring back the heads and other trophies that ensure the continued success of the community, while their womenfolk remain behind, at the 'centre' so to speak, growing rice and giving birth to children. I have already discussed the possible significance of these ideas in as far as they can be related to indigenous notions of cause and the cultural evaluation of male and female roles. I would like, however, at this point to briefly reconsider the cosmological implications of these views in connection with the spatial organization of the longhouse building, for this both corroborates my earlier arguments, while at the same time shedding light on a hitherto unexplained aspect of Iban ritual imagery.

As in many South East Asian societies, the Iban place of residence - ie. the longhouse building - is demarcated into various spatial zones that are of sociological or ritual significance. I have already mentioned how the longhouse structure may sometimes be depicted in arboreal terms, but in this instance a more significant division as far as our present interests are concerned, is between male and female areas of the house.

This can be formally presented as a distinction between, on the one hand, the public gallery (*ruai*) and open air verandah (*tanju*) of the longhouse, which are designated as 'male'; and on the other, the *bilek*-apartment, or rear of the house, which is designated as 'female'. Thus Sutlive tells us that the front of the house - i.e. the verandah side - is said to be 'high', and is the place "where honored guests enter in contrast to the 'low' rear where the females reside" (1978: 52). Similarly one finds that "on festive occasions men are seated at the highest part of the *ruai*, i.e. along its outer wall, while women enter the *bilek* of relatives and friends" (Sutlive 1978: 55; see also Brooke-Low 1892: 29; Sutlive 1977: 163). At the same time, it will be recalled that the *ruai* is the place where head trophies are hung, suspended over the small hearths (*bedilang*) that warm the gallery in the early morning or cool weather (Howell & Bailey 1900: 16; Howell 1977: 137; Gomes 1911: 44; Freeman 1970: 6; Richards 1981: 45; MacDonald 1956: 108; Freeman 1970: 6; Komanyi 1973: 56). In short, for the Iban the *ruai* is especially associated with men and male values, while the *bilek* apartment is primarily identified with women - a distinction that is perhaps at its most explicit in Sutlive's observation that "a man who spends too much time in the *bilek* is liable to be called 'female male' (*laki indu*)" (1978: 55).

Further examples of this division between male and female sectors of the longhouse building are readily found. For instance, it is reported that the nocturnal calls of a certain species of locust, who is identified by the Iban as the earthly manifestation of the creator deity Selampandai (above), when heard from the *bilek* side of the longhouse signals the conception of a female child, but when heard from the verandah side signifies the conception of a male (Perham 1881b: 146; Harrisson & Sandin

1966: 55-56; Jensen 1974: 111 n1). Similarly, we are told that at a *saut* ceremony (see p. 167ff.), offerings to the "gods of women" are thrown from the window of the *bilek* apartment, while those destined for the "gods of men" are thrown from the verandah (Howell & Bailey 1900: 149; Gomes 1911: 174). Then again one learns that in the rites for the removal of the longhouse to a new location, the *tuai burong*, or augur, divides his collection of *kayu burong* (lit. 'bird sticks' - short lengths of twig that are picked up by the augur each time he sees an appropriate bird or hears its call, as a 'marker' of the event), between the *bilek*, for women, and the *ruai* for men (Jensen 1974: 137). In short, one finds that the Iban regularly, and consistently, designate the gallery and the verandah, on the one hand, and the *bilek* apartment, on the other, as respectively male and female areas of the longhouse.

The argument that I wish to put forward here is that this spatial division of the longhouse has a cosmological significance which at the same time reflects upon Iban notions of male and female gender roles. That is to say that, on the one hand, the identification of women with the seclusion of the *bilek* apartment can be interpreted in terms of their 'static' location 'within' the confines of society, while on the other, the association of men with the *ruai* and the open-air verandah can be linked to their characterization as adventurers in the world 'out there'. These cosmological inferences are often quite explicit (c.f. p. 225 n.1). For example, Sutlive, in his description of events at a *gawai batu* or whetstone festival, specifically mentions that *male* guests are said to "traverse the 'universe', moving along the verandah from south to north" (1978: 67; emphasis added). What is more, he adds that

"When they reach the northern end of the verandah, they are led back along the outer edge or the preeminently male section of the house just inside the front wall. 'To the top, to the top, friend' (*Katas, katas, uai*) is urged upon each guest, the outgoing orientation of the Iban being structurally expressed in the designation of the outer wall as 'the highest place'" (1978: 67).

Female guests, on the other hand, drop out of the procession on the 'outward' journey - i.e. as they move northwards along the inner wall of the gallery - entering into the *bilek* apartments of close friends and relatives, as their menfolk proceed to the outer limits of the universe, represented in this scheme of things by the external wall of the gallery (Sutlive 1978: 67). In this instance then, the cosmological significance of the gallery and verandah in relation to the *bilek* is clearly expressed, and the suggestion here is that the procession itself can be seen as a ritual statement of the differing roles and degrees of mobility of men and women.

But if Iban conceptions of gender can be linked, on the one hand, to the cosmological significance that is attached to various spatial divisions of the longhouse building, they can also, I suggest, provide us with an understanding of the ritual importance of hornbills in connection with Iban headhunting ceremonies. The image of the rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*), or *kenyalang*, features prominently at Iban headhunting festivals, one of which is actually known by the title of *gawai kenyalang*. The latter is described as a most lavish affair, and in the past could only be sponsored by an outstanding warrior, of mature years, who had taken several heads¹⁸ (Howell 1977: 122-4, 127-33; Nyuak 1977: 218-21; Gomes 1911: 210-214; Freeman 1966; Jensen 1974: 195; Sandin

1977: 12; Richards 1981: 97). Briefly, the ritual attention on such occasions is primarily focused upon the mounting of an elaborately carved and painted wooden effigy of the rhinoceros hornbill atop a tall, tapering pole which is set up on the verandah of the longhouse. This procedure bears a striking resemblance to the erection of the *tiang kelingkang* at a *gawai burung* festival and it may well be that the pole on which the *kenyalang* images are mounted might possess a similar arboreal significance. The main point to note here, however, is the ideas that during the course of the ceremonies, the wooden hornbill effigy becomes "mystically endowed with life" (Freeman 1960b: 100), which enables it to be "sent to attack in spirit form the habitations, possessions and persons of enemy tribesmen" (Freeman 1960b: 100). Ultimately, we are told, "the intention is the killing of the souls (*semengat*) of existing enemies so ensuring victory when an actual attack is made upon them" (Freeman 1960b: 100).

The rhinoceros hornbill is a very large and dramatic bird, and frequently appears in the mythology and oral literature of many Bornean peoples. For the Iban, however, it is not revered in any particular way, nor is it attributed any special augural significance; indeed, one finds that as often as not it is killed for its plumage and meat (Freeman 1960b: 99). In this respect, the elevated status of the hornbill image in the context of Iban headhunting festivals presents something of an ethnographic 'problem', especially when one considers that the avian manifestation of Lang Sengalang Burong is said to be the Brahminy kite, or fish eagle, *Haliastur indus*.

A widely accepted explanation of this apparent anomaly originates in Harrisson's analysis of a Saribas myth recounting the election of the

rhinoceros hornbill as leader of the birds in place of the ineffectual Indian Cuckoo, Kuang Kapong (*Culculus micropterus*) (1964). Harrisson interprets this story as reflecting the emergence of an "indigenous embryo 'nationalism'" on the part of the Iban and other Bornean peoples, whereby the migratory (i.e. 'overseas') cuckoo is superceded by a native species (1964: 537). Following on from this, Harrisson subsequently identifies the rhinoceros hornbill as the "supreme *worldly* Bird", who in his capacity as "Chief of the Birds" welcomes the arrival of Lang Sengalang Burong - "the God of the Birds" - at *gawai burong* and *gawai kenyalang* festivals (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 124, emphasis in text; see also Sather 1977b: xi; Sandin 1977: 12).

Such arguments do not bear close scrutiny. For example, I can find no evidence to suggest that Lang is regarded as "god of the birds", while it seems, by Harrisson's own account (1960: 36-37) that the importance of hornbills in Bornean folklore predates the advent of colonialism or foreign intervention in native affairs. Instead I would like to argue here that the ritual significance of the rhinoceros hornbill in Iban headhunting imagery can in fact be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the relationship between Iban men - seen as the procurers of the fruits of the mythical *ranyai* and Pauh Laba trees - and their womenfolk - who are the recipients of these most precious trophies.

To elaborate, the rhinoceros hornbill is remarkable, not only for its size, plumage, and casque¹⁹, but also for its singular nesting habits, whereby the female of the species is incarcerated in a hole in a tree whose access to the outside world is sealed off by her male partner with a wall of mud (Smythies 1960: 312-13). There she incubates her eggs and remains, secure from predators, until such a time when her brood are old

enough to begin to learn to fly and fend for themselves. During this period, she and her chicks are kept alive by feed passed to them by the male bird through a small aperture in the wall of mud that he has left for this purpose, and the suggestion that I would like to put forward here is that the special relationship existing between male and female hornbills can, in many respects, be seen to resemble the relationship between Iban men and women. That is to say that on the one hand, the spatial association of women with the seclusion of the *bilek* apartment (above) - which is of course the focus of family life, and the place of childbirth (Jensen 1967: 172)- can be seen as a parallel of the incarceration of the female bird, together with her chicks, in the hollow of a tree²⁰; while on the other, the role of Iban men as headhunters and adventurers in the world 'out there', resembles that of the male bird who must scour the jungle for food to bring to his mate and their offspring.

This identification of Iban men with hornbills is clearly expressed in the ceremonial attire of Iban warriors who adorn themselves with their feathers (Beccari 1904: 46; Richards 1981: 186) and arrange their costume in imitation of the bird's plumage (see fig. 9). Furthermore, one finds that on the occasion of a *gawai kenyalang*, the wooden hornbill carvings are removed from the longhouse verandah by the officiating bards (*lemembang*), who then carry them into each *bilek* apartment, singing as they do so verses that extol traditional moral values and family duties (Nyauk 1977: 220; Freeman 1960: 101)²¹. Bearing in mind the cosmological significance of the longhouse building, this movement from verandah to *bilek* can, I suggest, be linked to the homecoming of the male hornbill, who returns with food for his immured consort and her chicks. In this connection it is therefore especially interesting to note that the hornbill

lives principally on wild fruit (Smythies 1960: 313, 318) - in contrast with the Brahminy kite, which catches fish - for in this respect there is evidently a further

Fig. 9



Iban warrior in ceremonial attire
(from a photograph in Wright, Morrison
& Wong 1974:115).

affinity between the male of the species and Iban warriors, who, like the male hornbill, return to their females with the 'fruit' (i.e. heads) that they have gathered in the course of their journey into far-flung corners of the universe²². In short, the suggestion here is that the ritual significance of the rhinoceros hornbill in Iban headhunting ceremonies can ultimately be related to an idea of Iban men as cosmic travellers, who,

from time to time, set off for remote and even unearthly regions, thereby to procure the fruit of the *ranyai* palm, which they bring back for their womenfolk who, like the female hornbill incarcerated in her tree, await their return in the secluded safety of the *bilek* apartment²³. In this respect, then, the question that should perhaps be asked is not 'Why the special importance of hornbills in Iban headhunting imagery?' but rather 'Why is it that Lang Sengalang Burong should be given the avian identity of a Brahminy kite?'²⁴.

At this point, I would like to recapitulate briefly, and draw together the principal themes and issues that have emerged in the course of the present chapter. Central to our discussion has been the idea of a socio-centric cosmos, whereby the longhouse community and its surrounding lands are conceived as being located at the 'centre' of the universe, while the regions that lie beyond are endowed with a quasi-mythical character, being depicted as the realm of the gods (*petara*), spirits and demons (*antu*), legendary heroes (Orang Panggau Libau), non-people (*orang bukal*). This division between the realm of man and his society, on the one hand, and the world 'out there', on the other, can all too easily be represented in terms of a structuralist 'opposition' between Culture and Nature. I have argued against such a strategy, however, principally on the grounds that these categories are heavily laden with our own, inevitably ethnocentric, presuppositions about the way things are in the world - presuppositions that may not be entirely appropriate in an Iban context. Instead, I have suggested that it is perhaps better to see this cosmological demarcation as a distinction between social and non-social

realms, the latter being defined as a wild and largely unknown domain, encompassing all that does not fall within the sphere of man and his society.

These two realms, though distinguished in this way, nevertheless coincide, or dovetail, with one another, so that it is possible to move from one domain to the other, and back again. In the case of mankind, to journey beyond the familiar, or known, world of the longhouse territory is to enter into an increasingly mythological landscape, frequented by the gods, spirits, demons and other mystical figures of the Iban pantheon. Such a venture may be perilous for it risks an encounter with the malevolent and demoniac denizens of the forest who prey upon the lives of the unwary. Nevertheless, it is deemed a periodic necessity, for 'out there' is where the mystical *ranyai* palm grows, whose fruits supply the 'raw materials' of reproduction in the domestic sphere - namely seed. The responsibility for acquiring this precious resource falls upon men who, in their role as headhunters, are depicted as gathering the fruit of this fabulous tree. In this respect, Iban men are likened to the male hornbill who scours the forest for fruit to bring back to his mate and their offspring during the period of their incarceration. By the same token, Iban women are like the female of the species as they await the return of their husbands and lovers from the warpath, bringing with them, it is hoped, the fruit of the *ranyai* palm, and with it, the promise of future children and bountiful harvests.

For the purposes of analysis, these ideas can be thought of in abstract terms as a movement back and forth between a 'centre' - i.e. the longhouse and its surrounding lands - and a 'periphery': namely the horizon (*tisi langit*), which is depicted as the realm of the gods and

spirits and as the supposed location of the mythical *ranyai* palm. What is more, this movement can be seen as effecting a transformation, or change of state, through the acquisition of a mystical agency at the periphery. For example, the successful return of Iban warriors from the warpath is portrayed as being instrumental in bringing about the fertility of rice and women. Similarly, the trophies of *bejalai* expeditions are frequently invested with a mystical significance, or endowed with magical properties that may subsequently influence the course of events in various avenues of life. At the same time, the institution of *bejalai* may also be conceived as an agency of social change, introducing novel ideas and cultural innovations from elsewhere - a theme which is implicitly stated in the legendary journeys of Iban culture heroes to far flung corners of the universe. Furthermore, those who travel beyond the familiar boundaries of the longhouse territory into strange and distant lands may be seen as themselves transformed by their experiences, thereby acquiring status and maturity in the eyes of society (below). In short, one finds that while Iban cosmology implicitly distinguishes the realm of man and his society, and the quasi-mythological landscape of the regions that lie beyond, it at the same time establishes a kind of dynamic tension between the two domains, whereby a movement from one sphere to the other is seen as creating a set of conditions through which various sorts of changes, or transformations of state, may be realized.

Red, ripeness and the warpath of women

One of my principal reasons for developing the idea of transformation, as outlined above, is the light that is shed upon the

hitherto mysterious designation of the art of dyeing as the 'warpath of women' (*kayau indu*). Related to this is the ritual significance of the term *mansau* - meaning both 'red' and 'ripe' (as opposed to 'green' or 'immature' [*mata*]) - and it is with the latter set of associations that I would like to begin. The colour red is often found in conjunction with Iban headhunting and warfare. For example, a red flag signifies a state of war (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 63); the spear sent around neighbouring villages to invite their members to join forces in a headhunting raid is decorated with red cloth (Gomes 1911: 177); and the species of cordyline plant that is planted to commemorate a successful expedition is known as *sabang api* (literally, 'fire cordyline') being "very red" in colour (Richards 1981: 316). Also, shields are painted red (Ling Roth 1896 II: 136); protective charms are strung on red thread (Sandin 1966: 27); and the sword scabbards of young men are decorated with little red balls of cotton (Harrison 1965: 48). Furthermore, the daughters of Lang Sengalang Burong require a fresh head that is "still red" (*agi chaning*) - i.e. one that drips blood (Sandin 1977: 4, 69, 71); the *ranyai* palms growing in Madang Ranyai are described as "swelling with buds which [are about to] burst into red hibiscus flowers"²⁵ (Sandin 1966: 66-67); the slashing of scarlet-juiced palm fruits signifies the decapitation of the enemy (Harrisson 1965: 17, 44); and the coconuts that represent trophy heads in the rites of *ngelempang*, when they are split open to release their precious seed, are bound with red thread (Freeman 1979: 247; see also Perham 1878: 131n).

Those who adhere to Turner's analysis of the colour triad red, white and black (1967: ch.3), might interpret this association of red with warfare as a function of the blood shed in battle, and it is possible that

many Iban would agree with this point of view. Nevertheless it is important to realize here that the Iban term for red -*mansau* - also means ripe. Given the connection between headhunting and fertility, and the portrayal of decapitation as the gathering of fruit, it seems reasonable to suggest that redness in the context of warfare can be understood as a kind of visual pun signifying both bloodshed *and* the ripeness and fecundity with which this is associated. In this respect it is therefore important to note that while the coconuts which are substituted for trophy heads in the rites of *ngelempang* (see p. 360), and which are subsequently cut open to 'release' all kinds of seed, are tied with red cotton (Freeman 1979: 242-43; see also Perham 1878: 131n), so too are the stalks of fully ripened rice which are bound together in the Iban rites of harvest rituals (see pp. 293, 297).

But if the term *mansau* describes both ripeness and the colour red, one also finds that it has a further meaning, namely 'cooked' (Richards 1981: 208). This additional sense is in fact perfectly consistent with our present arguments, for we are again dealing with a process of transformation. In other words, through cooking the raw is transformed into the edible just as unripe or immature fruit is transformed into the ripe, fecund and edible. For the anthropologist, however, mention of the terms 'cooked' and 'raw' provoke an immediate response in that they again call to mind all sorts of possible structural distinctions between the categories Nature and Culture. In this respect, one could argue - as Rosaldo & Atkinson have done - that headhunting, as a premeditated and purposeful act, is an instrument of culture, and one that supposedly gives men control over the natural processes of reproduction (Rosaldo & Atkinson 1975). But this of course brings us back to the idea of what is 'natural':

while western notions of cause and effect see child-bearing and the increase of rice as governed by the laws of nature, it is nevertheless conceivable that the Iban may consider the processes of parturition and rice growing - both of which, for them, are hedged in by a complex set of ritual procedures and prescriptions - to be more cultural phenomena, than belonging to nature which is ungoverned by such rules and regulations (c.f. the indigenous view of rice farming as the definitive characteristic of Iban society).

But whatever our reservations as regards the superimposition of a Lévi-Straussian nature/culture dichotomy onto the Iban material, it will be recalled that I have myself suggested that headhunting may be seen as a re-enactment, or re-assertion, of the transition from a wild, or pre-social state of being, to one of society, or civility. This is because it can be thought of as a ritual repetition of the introduction of the first rice to the ancestors of the Iban people. In this respect one can therefore argue that the taking of heads provides the Iban with a means by which they are able to maintain their cultural identity which is, on their own admission, defined by the cultivation of rice. It seems likely then, that in this instance, the raw may indeed be identifiable with a state of 'nature' - understood here in the sense of being prior to society - while the cooked signifies the attainment of culture.

This idea of headhunting as an agency of transformation sheds light on another set of association that like the hornbill have for a long time puzzled Iban scholars. I refer here to the Iban identification of weaving and textile manufacture as the female equivalent of headhunting, and in particular, to the description of the process of dyeing cloth as the 'warpath of women' (*kayau indu*) (Howell 1912: 64; Richards 1972: 68, 69;

1981: 361). These ideas are well-documented in the ethnographic literature (Howell 1977: 132; Gomes 1911: 213; Freeman 1957: 173; Sather 1977b: xiv-xv; Sandin 1977: 53; Richards 1981: 361), but there is little evidence to suggest as to why the Iban should make these associations other than the fact that headhunting and textile manufacture are singled out as quintessential male and female activities. The latter association may seem somewhat curious in view of the relationship between headhunting and rice cultivation in the light of the special emphasis that is placed upon the imagery of childbearing and female fertility in Iban agricultural discourse. I shall argue here, however, that the identification of dyeing and weaving with headhunting can in fact be understood as a *logical* equation, based on the idea of a transformation of state or being. That is to say, the suggestion here is that, conceptually, the creation of woven and dyed fabrics can be equated with the taking of heads in that they may both be seen as processes that involve the transformation of a 'raw', or undeveloped, state of material, into a 'ripe', or developed end-result.

To elaborate, Iban fabrics are divided into two categories: red cloth (*kain engkudu*), and non-red cloth (*kain mata*) (Howell 1912: 64; Richards 1981: 287). The word *engkudu* refers to a species of small tree (*Morinda citrifolia*) whose roots yield the mordant (*selup*) used to dye thread (*ubong*) red (Richards 1981: 85). The term *mata*, on the other hand, which is used to refer to all other varieties of cloth - i.e. those that are *not* red in colour - literally means unripe, green, raw, or uncooked (Howell 1912: 64; Richards 1981: 209). The suggestion here, then, is that red cloth (*kain mansu*) (Richards 1981: 208) - while it is usually referred to as *kain engkudu*, nevertheless carries connotations of ripeness (*mansau*) by virtue of the 'implicit meaning' of the colour red, which accordingly

distinguishes it from other varieties of fabric which are themselves collectively gathered together as 'green' or 'unripe' (*mata*) cloth, irrespective of their actual colour.

Only one in fifty women or so knows how to prepare the mordants (*selup*) for this task and it is these female specialists (*orang tau nakar*, *tau ngar*) who are identified as the feminine equivalent of the highest grade of war leaders (*orang tau serang*) (Sather 1977b: xv). Like their male counterparts, these women have secret spirit helpers (*antu nulong*)²⁶ (Howell 1912: 64; Freeman 1957b:173) who provide them with charms (*ubat*) to assist them in their tasks. In addition Richards reports that these women are entitled to have their hand tattooed "like a man who has taken a head trophy" (1981: 361). Furthermore, the task of dyeing, like headhunting, is seen as a dangerous undertaking - in mystical terms that is - and those who perform this task must take ritual precautions to strengthen (*kering*) their *semangat* (Howell 1912: 64). In short, a number of parallels can be drawn between the female art of dyeing on the one hand, and the male activity of headhunting on the other.

The important thing to note at this point is that although both weaving and dyeing are collectively identified as the female equivalent of headhunting, it is the use of mordants which is specifically singled out as the 'warpath of women'. In other words, it is the stage at which the natural cotton fibres receive their red colouring and the suggestion here is that it is this *colour transformation* which actually equates the process of dyeing with headhunting. That is to say that while on the one hand, the taking of heads may be conceived as being responsible for initiating a new cycle of agricultural growth and female fecundity; the use of mordants, on the other, can be seen as transforming natural, or 'raw',

cotton fibre into red - or 'ripened' (*mansau*) - thread. It is, then, this play on the two-fold significance of the term *mansau* which, I suggest, underlies the description of the art of dyeing as the feminine equivalent of warfare, in that both activities can be seen as agents of transformation whereby the immature, or undeveloped, is transformed into the fecund or ripe²⁷ (cf. the ritual use of red thread to encircle both ripened rice and Iban trophy heads - above).

To summarize briefly, the ritual significance of Iban headhunting is perhaps best conceived in the manner of an entelechy, being the condition by which a potential - namely the inherent reproductive capacity of Iban maidens and the rice crop with which they are associated - is realized. That is to say that in the case of the agricultural cycle the taking of heads fulfills an essential condition for the development of rice from seed to fully mature plant, being depicted as the means by which the rice seed is procured in the first place. In this respect, headhunting is logically prior to the acquisition of a state of culture - defined here as the cultivation of rice - and thus preempts the transition from a wild, or pre-social, state of being, to one of society, even humanity. At the same time, one finds that through its metaphorical identification with sexual intercourse, headhunting is also represented as a necessary prelude to the process of human procreation, whereby the potential fecundity of young Iban women is realized in the transformation of their maidenhood into motherhood.

These transformations can be gathered as different aspects of a single phenomenon, which, in the organic idiom of Iban discourse, is portrayed as a process of maturation in which the 'raw', or undeveloped

(*mata*) becomes transformed by their actions²⁸, acquiring maturity and status within the longhouse community. In other words, one finds that just as the taking of heads transforms Iban maidens into mothers, it simultaneously transforms Iban men from youths, or 'bachelors' (*bujang*)²⁹, into mature men and eligible husbands³⁰. In this last respect, then, headhunting can therefore be also thought of as a rite of passage.

This idea has been previously noted by Downs, who remarks that many Indonesian headhunting ceremonies can be seen as "an initiation or 'rite de passage' " in which the hero passes from childhood to maturity by means of a struggle which takes place in the cosmic sphere" (1955: 50). In doing so he points out that in the mythology this process often involves a theme of death and resurrection, whereby the hero is portrayed as dying, or being killed, but then being subsequently revived to do battle with the enemy and return in triumph to his village, or longhouse, with the heads of his foe (Downs 1955: 50). Downs, following in the dualistic tradition of the Leiden school, interprets this imagery as a reflection of the "repetition of the cosmic cycle of life and death and struggle between the two halves of the universe: the Upper and Underworlds" (1955: 51). To suppose, however, that the Iban adhere to a similarly bifurcated view of the universe is, I have suggested, an unwarranted inference, given the existing ethnographic evidence, which suggests instead a socio-centric model of the cosmos. Nevertheless, one does find that there is a strong association between headhunting and the Iban way of death which expresses itself in the traditional view that mourning could only be properly relieved by the taking of a fresh head. I shall argue below, however, that the underlying theme in this instance is not one of a continuing 'struggle' between the antagonistic halves of a divided universe, one of which is

identified with life, and the other, death; rather it is one of organic regeneration, in which a new cycle of 'growth', or expansion, in the life of the longhouse community is set in motion by the return of a successful headhunting expedition.

Headhunting and the termination of mourning

The Iban idea that mourning (*ulit*) could only be properly relieved by the taking of a fresh head is well documented in the ethnographic literature (St John 1863 I: 63, 71; Brooke 1866 I: 201; Brooke-Low in Ling Roth 1896 I: 155; Howell 1977: 126-27; 137-38; Beccari 1904: 47; Gomes 1911: 139; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 269; Morgan 1968: 148; Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 300 n36; Wagner 1972: 138; Uchibori 1978: 114; Richards 1981: 355, 409). For example, St. John tells us that

"[a]fter the death of relatives, they [the Iban] seek for the heads of enemies, and until one is brought in they consider themselves to be in mourning, wearing no fine clothes, striking no gongs, nor is laughing or merry-making in the house allowed; but they have a steady desire to grieve for the one lost to them, and seek a head of an enemy, as a means of consoling themselves for the death of the departed" (1863 I: 63).

Similarly, Howell reports that with the return of a successful headhunting party "anyone [who] is bereaved and still bound by the mourning tie ... goes and fetches the new head in order to free himself from it, a fowl being killed when the head is removed from its place and a plate ... presented to its owner on its being returned" (1977: 137)

The actual ceremony of 'opening' the mourning (*muka ulit*) is described by Howell as follows:

"Everybody is seated and order is kept for the space of about half an hour, in order that proper respect may be paid to the ceremony of *muka ulit*, or the unloosening of the mourning tie. A gong is struck at the head of a procession which is then formed to announce the freedom of the mourners from their sacred tie by those who have recently returned from a war expedition. The mourning robes are touched with the sharp blades of the warrior's sword and cast aside, and the mourners are at once girt with their best apparel. Whilst this is going on war cries are shouted and deafening music from brass instruments creates an infernal din. A fowl is waved over the mourner's heads and killed, and the blood is smeared on their persons. Then and not until then is the sacred tie of mourning pronounced loosened" (1977: 78)

A more recent account of this ceremony is provided by Uchibori, who witnessed its performance among contemporary Layar Skrang Iban. In this instance, he tells us,

"a head was borrowed from the longhouse headman ... [and] a bundle of leaves was borrowed from a man who had brought them home from the forest where he had been hunting not long before. The shaman³¹ went down to a spot not far from the longhouse, taking the head and the bundle of leaves. A number of boys accompanied him. After a while, the group came marching back to the longhouse led by the shaman. At the foot of the entrance ladder they gave a series of war cries and then entered the longhouse. The shaman then put the head in a winnowing basket³² placed on the gallery in front of the bereaved's *bilek*. The shaman then entered the *bilek* and carried out the ritual of *ngetas ulit* [lit. 'cutting the mourning'; see above]...After the ritual was over, the head was given a simple offering of tobacco leaves and replaced in its original hanging rack" (Uchibori 1978: 113).

An important point to note in the latter account is the removal of the old trophy head from the longhouse and its subsequent ceremonial reintroduction in the hands of the individual chosen to perform the formal loosening of the mourning ties. The ritual implications of this action can, I suggest, be directly linked with the cosmological significance of Iban headhunting raids, and in particular, to the idea that trophy heads come from the world 'out there'. In this connection it is also important to take note of Uchibori's reference to a bundle of leaves collected from the *jungle* during the course of a hunting expedition, for elsewhere, he tells us that these leaves are in fact none other than those of the *isang* palm (Uchibori 1978: 110). Spathes of this palm, it will be recalled, traditionally denoted the success of headhunting expeditions, which would seem to be their significance here. Confirmation of this is found in another account of contemporary Iban death rituals, which reports that the man responsible for breaking the mourning left the longhouse at dawn only to return brandishing a war sword and *isang* palm leaves which had been left overnight in the forest (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 309-10). In this particular instance, the authors specifically mention that the palm leaves were formerly "associated with the return of a successful headtaker" (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 310), and they add that on approaching the longhouse, the man concerned, together with a number of small boys who had gathered around him, uttered the traditional war cries of the Iban, as would a headhunting party, returning with their prize (Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 310; c.f. Howell 1977: 78 - above)).

In summary then, it is evident that in ritual terms headhunting to this day still plays a central role in the termination of Iban mourning³³, and that the principal actor in these rites is specifically identified with

a successful warrior returning from the field of battle with a freshly taken head³⁴. But if there "remains no doubt that headhunting hence had some connection with the termination of mourning among the Iban" (Uchibori 1978: 114), we are still left with the problems of deciding upon the precise nature of this relationship between the taking of heads and the release from *ulit*.

Uchibori has suggested that

"possibly a peculiar psychological factor is involved here. Going headhunting or wandering (*bejalai* or *belelang*) in strange lands may bring about a cathartic effect for those who had an 'uncomfortable' condition of bereavement. In other words, the emotional depression caused by the loss may be overwhelmed and eliminated by the excitement and danger of a headhunting expedition" (1978: 117)

Similarly he argues that at a more general level,

"it is easily understood that welcoming a headhunting party ... brings about an emotionally heightened atmosphere. It swings back the psychological pendulum from the depressed state of mourning to excitement and elation. We can reasonably assume that this emotional swing helps prepare the community for the return to normal life" (1978: 120).

But while the mounting of a headhunting expedition may well have important emotional and psychological benefits for a bereaved community³⁵, they do not in themselves explain the connection between the taking of heads and the termination of mourning. Thus we are still left with a "most crucial question" - namely, "why is headhunting associated with mortuary rites at all?" (Uchibori 1978: 118). It is to this issue, then, that I now turn.

Headhunting and the renewal of life

As we have seen (ch. 5), the Iban frequently express their desire for the social continuity of their *bilek* family and longhouse community in future generations, and I shall argue here that it is this concern which ultimately underlies the special place of headhunting in Iban social and religious ideology. By this I mean that headhunting - conceived here as a necessary precondition for bringing about the fertility of rice and women - can be thought of as the lynch pin at the centre of a cyclical process of agricultural productivity and social reproduction. In this respect then, the taking of heads can ultimately be seen as crucial to ensuring the future survival of the longhouse community.

Death, on the other hand, threatens this desirable state of affairs, for as we saw earlier, it generates a condition of *angat*, or 'heat', which - as is consistent with the organic tone of Iban cultural discourse - is regarded as being inimical to life. If not properly dealt with, this unhealthy condition may spread like a blight through the community much as it did in the myth of Serapoh (p. 200), and is intimated in the imagery of withered *ayu* and *bungai*. Fortunately, the contagious effects of death can be averted by the ritual separation of the deceased from the living, which is achieved in the performance of the rites of *serara* (p. 199 ff.). Nevertheless, death still leaves the longhouse community with its ranks breached, and its membership depleted. It is for this reason, I suggest, that full mourning could only be ended by the taking of an enemy head, which, as the container of seed, can be thought of as injecting new 'life' into the community, reversing the inauspicious consequences of death (c.f.

my earlier arguments concerning the return of headhunting expeditions and the incidence of conception; p. 399)³⁶

In this connection, one should note that in Uchibori's account of death rites among the contemporary Layar Skrang Iban, those responsible for the termination, or 'opening', of mourning restrictions - who, as we have seen, are explicitly identified with returning headhunters - are described as entering the longhouse from the *pun* end of the building (1978: 109), while the corpse is dispatched from the other (*ujong*) end (1978: 65). The term *pun*, it will be recalled, has overtly organic associations, denoting a *fons et origo*, or stem as of a tree, from which the development of any kind of activity springs. The suggestion here, then, is that in the context of the termination of mourning, the entry of the longhouse from the *pun* can be linked to a theme of social regeneration, conceived, as is characteristic of Iban discourse, in terms of a vegetative process, or 'growth' (c.f. my earlier discussion of the portrayal of the longhouse community as a 'tree', pp. 193-195).

Following on from this, one should also note that the term *idup*, meaning life, can alternatively be used to denote 'fresh', or 'green' (as of vegetation) (Richards 1981: 112). Furthermore, widows and widowers (*balau*) who are freed from mourning by the rites of *muka ulit* are described as being 'ripe' (*balu mansau*) (Sandin 1968a: 42-43; Uchibori 1978: 123), while the restriction of wearing red (*mansau*) cloth or floral (*bebunga*) textiles is simultaneously lifted (Jensen 1974: 94). In the latter instance, the suggestion is that this 'ripening' of widow(er)s and the restoration of their right to wear red (ie. ripe) or floral materials, can be understood as an expression of their release from a sterile

(*parai*)³⁷, or unfruitful, state of being, or condition, brought about by their close proximity to death.

Pursuing these ideas further, it may be recalled that in the past, full release from mourning could only be properly achieved through the performance of a *gawai antu* which is the occasion when the dead are commemorated by their surviving relatives³⁸. In this connection it is therefore interesting to discover that the chants describing the return of the dead to attend the festivities are specifically referred to as *sabak bebuah* (Howell & Bailey 1900: 144; Howell 1977: 77; Richards 1981: 96). The term *sabak* - meaning literally 'to wail' - is clearly related to the funeral dirge of the same name which guides the *semengat* of the recently deceased to the Iban afterworld immediately following their death; the term *bebuah*, on the other hand, means 'to fruit', or 'make fruitful' (Richards 1981: 51), and the suggestion here is that its particular significance in the present context refers specifically to the restoration of the longhouse community to a 'cool' (*celap*), healthy, and reproductively viable state, following the dissipation of the 'heated' or 'feverish' (*angat*) condition arising from a number of uncommemorated dead. Furthermore, one finds that one of the key sequences in the narrative of the *sabak bebuah* chants describes how the party of the dead halt at Madang Ranyai - i.e. the grove where the mythical *ranyai* palms grow - in order to gather fruit which they then bring to the festival as gifts for their surviving friends and relatives (Sandin 1961: 186)³⁹. In other words, the suggestion here is that in doing so the dead make possible the beginning of a new cycle of fertility and social regeneration, paralleling the return of Iban warriors from the warpath, whose success, it should be

noted, was traditionally regarded as a prerequisite for the performance of a *gawai antu* (Perham 1884: 299; Ling Roth 1896 I: 258; Gomes 1911: 218).

In summary then, one finds that the traditional importance of headhunting in Iban society and culture can be related, not only to the ritual implications of this activity vis-à-vis the fertility of rice and women, but also to the special significance of trophy heads in as far as the termination of mourning is concerned. These two contexts, I have suggested, are interrelated in that they are both to do with the idea of social continuity and regeneration. Thus on the one hand, the taking of heads can be seen as an essential pre-condition for ensuring the success of the rice cycle and the fertility of Iban womanhood, while on the other, it reverses the state of sterility (*parai*) occasioned by death, restoring 'coolness' and health to the longhouse, and ushering in a new phase of fecundity and 'growth' in the life of the community.

Sebayan and the transmigration of *semengat*

But if headhunting restores the health and generative potential of the longhouse community in the wake of death, what of death itself? As we have seen, death is conceived by the Iban as a removal of the *semengat* to Sebayan, the Iban afterworld. Sebayan is situated along the upper reaches of the river Mandai, and a detailed description of this post-mortem voyage is set out in the *sabak* funeral dirge that is performed on the evening following a death, or some time shortly afterwards (Perham 1884: 289-90; Gomes 1911: 228-29; Howell 1977: 7--71; Nyuak 1977: 182; Harrisson 1965; Sandin 1966; Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 289-91; Sather 1978b: 329; Uchibori 1978: 188 seq; Richards 1981: 315-16). The important point to note here

is that the river Mandai actually exists (see p. 133), and can in this respect be seen as linking the geographical reality of the physical world to the imaginary landscape of the Iban mythical universe. Thus Uchibori writes that in the text of the *sabak* dirge

"we see a gradual change of scenery from the real world, beginning with the longhouse and nearby locations into the purely imaginary world of the Land of the Dead via numerous geographically arranged points" (1978: 207).

He adds: "in this sense there is a strong continuity between the real world and the Afterworld" (Uchibori 1978: 207).

In embarking upon this voyage to the hereafter, the *semangat* of the deceased is escorted by a party of those who have died before him, and we are told that, in many respects, this "journey of the deceased is ... conceived to be somewhat similar to a real journey which living humans may make, particularly in their emigration (*pindah*) to a new territory" (Uchibori 1978: 207). This theme can actually be discerned in the Iban conception of Sebuyan as a land where the soil is marvellously fertile, and where the forests abound with fruit and game, and the rivers teem with fish (Howell & Bailey 1900: 144; Howell 1977: 77; Nyuak 1977: 183; Uchibori 1978: 233; Richards 1981: 328). That is to say that while in the world of the living the desire to migrate is primarily stimulated by the thought of the virgin forests and untapped resources that lie ahead, "this is also the way that the Iban picture the Land of the Dead" (Uchibori 1978:301).

This idea of death as a kind of migration is explicit in the nature of the *sabak* journey, which closely resembles the journeys and

expeditions that are made by the Iban in real life. Thus Uchibori writes:

"the journey which the *semengat* undertakes ... reproduces almost precisely the journeys the living Iban make in this world. The advancing *semengat* should also depend on omens as the living do. There are, it is supposed, a number of huts (*langkau beburong*) on the way up to the point of 'no return', which is the Bridge of Fright [see p. 150 n 44]. The errant or departed *semengat* will stop at each hut seeking favourable omens, the signals that he should go on. The meaning which each omen is normally supposed to convey is reversed for such a *semengat*⁴⁰. What is taken as a good omen by the living Iban is a bad sign for an errant *semengat*, and will cause it to stop its journey. The owner will then recover. Conversely, an inauspicious omen to the living is taken by a dying person's *semengat* as a favourable omen indicating that it should continue on its journey to the Land of the Dead" (1978: 213)

In short, for the Iban, the afterworld is like a "territory into which they are going to migrate" (Uchibori 1978: 301), while death itself is represented as a migration (*pindah*) from the land of the living to this Iban Arcadia.

But if the transmigration of *semengat* to Sebayang may, on the one hand, be identified with an idea of migration into fresh tracts of virgin forest, it can at the same time be linked also to the outward journey of Iban headhunters as they venture forth into the world 'out there'. That is to say, the dead, like Iban warriors, leave behind the familiar territory of the longhouse community and its surrounding lands, and enter into a mythical landscape, approached via the river Mandai at whose source Sebayang is supposed to lie. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the *sabak* dirge actually describes the party of the dead passing through the region where the *ranyai* palm grows - Madang Ranyai - in the course of their progress towards the afterworld (see above). Unlike the expeditions of headhunters (which

are ideally concluded with their triumphant homecoming), the journey of the dead is one from which there is no return. That is to say, the dead are emphatically placed beyond the realm of man and his society, and it will be apparent that this cosmological re-location can be readily interpreted as a spatial metaphor for their physical and social departure from the longhouse community.

Several interesting points arise here. In the first place, one should note the designation of the dead as *antu*, for this of course concurs with my earlier arguments as regards the use of this term in reference to non-social departments of the Iban universe (see pp. 418-419). As *antu*, the dead take on a threatening aspect, hence the importance of the rites of *serara* which are concerned with the proper and complete separation of the dead from the living. That is to say, the presence of the dead - like any other type of *antu* - is regarded as being potentially hazardous to the lives of those who have survived them, being the incursion of the world 'out there' into the realm of man and his society⁴¹.

But if the presence of the dead in the sphere of the living threatens the lives and well-being of surviving members of the longhouse community, conversely, to venture into the world 'out there' - which is after all to approach the realm of the dead - may have an equally adverse effect, exposing the lives of those who do so to unknown dangers and influences which are frequently of a mystical nature. It is this latter notion, I suggest, which underlies the Iban representation of sickness and disease as a disjunction between *semangat* and body (*tuboh*). By this I mean that the body, like the longhouse community, can be thought of as a 'centre', while any

displacement of the *semengat* away from the body can be seen as a movement towards the periphery that corresponds with the final migration of the *semengat* to the afterworld following death. In this connection it is therefore important to note that Jensen specifically mentions that "the gravity of [an] illness relates directly to the distance that the *semengat* has gone" (1974: 148); that is to say, the closer the *semengat* moves towards the realm of the dead, the more serious the condition of its owner.

I have already suggested that the final migration of the dead can in some respects be compared with the outward voyage of Iban headhunters, and a further parallel can be drawn between the disjunction of the *semengat* from the body - which exposes the former to the unwelcome attentions of malevolent *antu* - and the situation of Iban warriors on the warpath, who are represented in the oral literature as being joined in battle with demoniac *antu gerasi*. Thus one finds that the *semengat* of those who are ill may be said to have been wounded by the spears and darts of predatory *antu* (Nyuak 1977: 192, 205), just as Iban warriors may be wounded by the spears and blow-pipe darts of the enemy. Furthermore, the role of the Iban shaman, or *manang*, in retrieving the errant *semengat* of his patient is frequently compared to that of the headhunter, while the actual rites that are performed on such occasions are often constructed around a theme of "ghostly warfare" (Perham 1887: 99). This is at its most explicit in the rite of *pelian bebunch antu*, when the *manang* engages his supernatural opponent in mortal combat (see pp. 380-381). In short, the argument here is that the idea of a loss or abduction of the *semengat* as a cause of illness, can be understood in cosmological terms - as can the Iban

theory of mortality - whereby the *semengat* of the sick (or deceased) is seen not just simply as being absent from the body, but as having strayed beyond the realm of man and his society, into the alien and hostile regions of the world 'out there'.

This idea of sickness and death as a movement away from the 'centre' can be clearly discerned in the spatial ordering of Iban healing rites. These usually take place in the gallery (*ruai*) of the longhouse, but in cases of serious illness may involve the shaman moving into other parts of the building, and even venturing outside into the jungle as he travels in pursuit of his patient's *semengat* (Perham 1887: 91, 98; Howell & Bailey 1900: 121-22; Gomes 1911: 167, 170-72; Richards 1981: 262-263). My argument here is that the ordering of space both within and without the longhouse during the course of Iban healing rituals can ultimately be related to a native cosmology which, as we have seen, is organized around a socio-centric model of the universe. The cosmological orientation of the longhouse building has already been mentioned in our earlier discussion of the ritual significance of festival processions, but the important point to note here is that those rites where the shaman leaves the longhouse and goes out into the jungle are actually described by the Iban as *pelian nemuai ka Sebayan*, or 'taking the road to Sebayan' (Perham 1887: 98; Gomes 1911: 170; Richards 1981: 263). Such a ceremony is only performed as a last resort, and it is said that the *manang* may even lose his own life in undertaking such a task (Jensen 1974: 149) - i.e. by himself proceeding too far along the road to Sebayan⁴². What is of special interest to us in this particular instance is the three-way connection between the shaman's movement away from the longhouse and into the

jungle, the idea that the gravity of an illness is commensurate with the distance travelled by the patient's *semangat*, and the supposed location of the Iban hereafter in the world 'out there'.

In summary, Iban representations of life and death, and the nature of disease, can clearly be linked to spatial ordering of the cosmos wherein a distinction is drawn between the realm of man and society, on the one hand, and on the other, the world 'out there' beyond the frontiers of the longhouse territory. At a formal level of explanation, this indigenous scheme of things can be described in terms of a distinction between a 'centre' and a 'periphery'. That is to say, where as the living are located within the confines of society and at the 'centre' of the universe, the dead are placed at the edge, thereby reflecting their extra-social status. This situation, however, is not a stable one in that the 'centre' is always threatening to break up as older generations die and migrate towards Sebayau, which is located somewhere in the world beyond. In order to rectify this degeneration of the 'centre', new 'life' must be introduced into society, and this is of course achieved through the taking of heads. In this last respect then, the world 'out there' is conceived, not only as the domain of death, but also, as the source of life.

Conclusion

Downs in his study of Indonesian headhunting (1955) has suggested that

"head-hunting is effective in bringing fertility and health because it represents a repetition of the cosmic cycle of life and death and struggle between the two halves of the universe, the Upper and Underworlds. This process can obviously not be allowed to stop - hence there must be no end to the taking of heads" (1955: 51)

The "religious aspect" of these ideas he argues is

"based on a conception of the division of the universe into two antagonistic halves, the struggle between the two corresponding to the alternance between life and death. In real life the killing of a member of the opposing group means the death and temporary eclipse of that group and the rebirth and ascendancy of the other" (1955: 70).

Downs adds that in most of the ethnographic examples that he considered "it was possible to associate the performance of head-hunting ... with definite traces of dual organizations, and it would be tempting to speculate on the earlier forms and development of political organizations in connection with head-hunting in Indonesia" (1955: 70).

These arguments and remarks can of course be regarded as a classic example of the Leiden theoretical tradition at work, whereby several aspects of Indonesian society and culture are drawn together as manifestations of a single abstract phenomenon, namely dualism (see pp. 10 ff.). But while in the case of the Iban material it may indeed be possible to formulate a series of distinctions between men and women, headhunting and agriculture, Lang Sengalang Burong and Pulang Gana, and so on and so forth, it is a naive oversimplification to reduce the

complexities of Iban society and culture to so many transformations of a binary principle (see my criticism of Jensen pp. 12-13).

Nevertheless, there would still appear to be some idea of an alternation or oscillation between the states of life and death, as is revealed in my discussion above of the role of headhunting in Iban mortuary rituals. The suggestion here, however, is that this theme does not spring from some abstract notion of a "cosmic cycle" or a "struggle between two halves of an antagonistic universe" wherein the principle of life is 'opposed' to that of death; but rather that it arises out of the environmental and ecological setting of Iban society and culture.

To elaborate, in this chapter, I have been primarily concerned with cosmology, and in particular, with the Iban differentiation between the realm of man and his society, on the one hand, and on the other, the world 'out there', beyond the horizon. This division of the cosmos may of course be interpreted simply as a further manifestation of the binary principle that supposedly pervades the whole of Iban thought and culture (Jensen 1974: 211). Such a position, however, would be gravely misleading in that it seriously underplays the complexity of the relationship between the two domains, reducing these to a single abstract figure - namely an 'opposition' - whose status and definition remain undeclared. As it happens, one finds that this cosmological distinction between the sphere of man and his society, and the wider world 'out there' which encompasses it, is not a clear cut one. Indeed the two domains coincide with one another, so that the passage from one domain to the other is more to do with a progression than that of crossing a boundary as such. Nor is it explicitly

formulated in Iban discourse, but rather it is something of an analytical construct, based on a synthesis of Iban statements about, and attitudes towards the world in which they live. In this respect, the ethnographic evidence would appear to concur with a Lévi-Straussian view of the universe divided between the realm of Nature on the one hand, and that of Culture on the other. But, as I have indicated, such a comparison invites the imposition of our own ethnocentric assumptions about the nature of things onto what is otherwise a specifically Iban understanding of the world. For this reason, then, it is perhaps better to adopt a more sociological approach and view this cosmological division as arising out of a distinction between social and non-social spheres of influence, or realms of experience. That is to say, the world 'out there' is perhaps better conceived as beyond society and culture, and thus removed from the constraints of social regulations, being instead the domain of gods, spirits, demons, non-people and the dead.

But if Iban cosmology clearly differentiates between the social universe of men and the quasi-mythical regions that lie beyond, it nevertheless allows the possibility of movement back and forth between the two domains. Indeed, it seems that as far as the Iban are concerned, such a movement is regarded as absolutely essential to their survival, for 'out there', in some remote region of the rain forest, grow the mythical *ranyai* and Pauh Laba trees, whose fabulous fruit supply the Iban with the necessities of life, including the very means upon which their present existence and future well-being ultimately rests - namely seed. These ideas can of course be directly related to the ecological and environmental circumstances of Iban existence,

whereby the primal forests of remote regions represent an apparently inexhaustible repository of natural resources, the most important, of course, being uncultivated land, whose virgin soils hold forth the promise of a future prosperity and well-being. In other words, while the world 'out there', beyond the frontiers of the longhouse community and its immediate sphere of influence, may on the one hand be seen as a region of danger and potential misfortune (often mystical in nature), it may also, on the other hand, be alternatively conceived as a source of life and vitality. The latter perspective can of course be readily linked to the ecology of the Bornean rain forest, which as we noted at the very outset of this study is forever engaged in an unbroken cycle of growth, fructuation, decay and regeneration (p.4). These ideas are perfectly encapsulated in Iban eschatology which locates the afterworld in some far-off, but nevertheless distinctly earthly 'paradise', where the soil is amazingly fertile and the forests rich in fruit and game. Perhaps most notably it is the supposed location of Madang Ranyai where the mythical *nibong* palm is said to grow in great profusion. Thus one can argue that for the Iban, there is no death as such - not at least until the final dissolution of the *semengat* - only a continuation of life as we know it, albeit in some distant Shangri-la at the headwaters of the semi-mythical Mandai river. In this respect, 'heaven', for the Iban, is not to be found in the skies, but on the horizon, and it is towards that destination that they are forever moving, even it can ultimately be only reached in that final migration, which is of course death itself.

NOTES - Chapter IX

- 1 ie. the mythical *ranyai* palm which is said to belong to this family of prickly cluster palms (Richards 1981: 235)

- 2 One should of course note here that the past history of the Iban people in Sarawak has tended to support this point of view. That is to say that the dramatic territorial expansion of the Iban in the past - which was perhaps primarily fuelled by their never-ending quest for fresh tracts of land for their rice farms - can at the same time be directly related to their passion for headhunting and warfare, which enabled them to displace, or else totally overwhelm all those who lay in the path of their advance, or who laid rival claim to the virgin forests up ahead (see, for example, Freeman 1970: 150-51).

- 3 For example, in one story, which tells of Keling's war raid to the skies, his colleagues ask him, 'Shall we return in a day?', to which he replies 'May we spend nights away, and take as provisions three *pasus* of rice' (Perham 1886: 269) (1 *pasus* - 3/4 cwt of rice). In other words, the provisions indicate that the expedition is to be of some length, and this is confirmed by Keling's reference to being away several nights.

- 4 Numerous references to Malay armies in Iban oral literature speak of a history of confrontation with local chiefdoms scattered along the coast of Sarawak, whose subjects, theoretically at least, owed allegiance to the Sultan of Brunei (see pp. 69-70)

- 5 n.b. Lumholtz writing more generally about headhunting in Borneo tells us that "usually headhunting raids were, and still are to a limited extent, carried far away into distant regions and may occupy some months" (1920 I: 256)

- 6 c.f. the term *jalai* meaning to go, or travel (Richards 1981: 121)
- 7 Jensen reports that the Iban refer to their remote ancestors who dwelt in the forests as hunter-gatherers - much as the Punan do today - as being like wild creatures, or *baka antu*, literally, like *antu*, that is, not entirely human" (1974: 151).
- 8 One should note in this connection that the very similar use of the term *toh* among the neighbouring Kayan people which on the one hand refers to trophy heads while on the other it describes the category of spirits or "intelligent powers" that inhabit the forests, mountains, caves and sea (Hose & McDougall 1966 II: 19, 23)
- 9 Interestingly, it is the Iban themselves that feature in the Land Dayak fear of supernatural enemies. Geddes writes of

"one of the most powerful fears of the Land Dayaks. This is the fear of headhunters, or *pinyamun*. Periodically it sweeps over the whole Sadong, causing not only the Land Dayaks to tremble but the Chinese and Malays as well. The *pinyamun* are mysterious beings who can appear and disappear anywhere at will, with an ease which defies all normal human laws. But despite their supernatural attributes, every Land Dayak can penetrate their masquerade. He knows that they are really *bi Saribas*, the terrible Sea Dayaks [Iban] from around the Saribas river" (1954: 22).
- 10 n.b.the ninth and final stage in the cycle of *gawai burong* festivals is actually known by the title of *gawai gerasi papa* (Sandin 1977: 13).
- 11 It is interesting to note here that Kumang's mother, while pregnant, had a craving for the fruit of Pauh Laba tree which was only finally obtained from the crocodile spirit Ribai on condition that if the child was a girl she should become his wife. But of course Kumang eventually married Keling, and so Ribai has subsequently always been at war with the people of Panggau Libau for the breach of this promise (Richards 1981: 170).
- 12 n.b. a number of associations between headhunting and the hunting of pig are to be found in the ethnography. For example, the demoniac hunters - *antu gerasi* - who roam the jungle and prey upon the lives of men and who at the same time can be identified with the enemy (see p. 389-90), are said to perceive human beings as wild

boar (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 181). Then again the location of those who have lost their lives while out hunting is the same in the Iban Afterworld as that of Iban warriors who have died in battle (Sather 1978b: 329).

- 13 n.b. the *embawang* is a species of wild mango (Richards 1981: 76), which is of course consistent with my earlier arguments concerning wild and domesticated cycles of production (pp. 421 ff.).

- 14 It should be pointed out that iron does not always have positive connotations. For example, it is forbidden (*mali*) to store milled rice (*beras*) in metal containers lest it become 'heated' (*angat*) and the *semengat padi* curse the family responsible (Sandin 1980a: 93). Nor should the forge be used during the planting season for the same reasons (Jensen 1974: 177) while the first grain of the harvest is reaped by hand rather than with a metal *ketap* hand-knife so as not to frighten the *semengat padi* from the fields (Jensen 1974: 190). Then again cutting of the umbilical cord should not be performed with a metal implement; rather it should be carried out with a bamboo knife to avoid injuring the individual's *semengat* (Jensen 1967: 173).

- 15 It is important to distinguish Selampandai from Bunsu Petara who created the first man and woman from the stem of the *bangkit* banana tree.

- 16 The gold referred to here was of course panned from river silt, not mined.

- 17 One should of course recognize the crucial importance of iron and steel in relation to Iban warfare, and it is interesting to note the metaphorical significance of 'farm implements' in the allegorical portrayal of headhunting as warfare in Iban ritual invocation (see Apendix C).

- 18 It was feared that should a younger, or less worthy, man attempt to sponsor such an important festival, it might seriously shorten his life (Sandin 1977: 12).

- 19 The rhinoceros hornbill gets its common name from its tremendous beak adornment which takes the form of a massive horn, or 'helmet', of ivory.
- 20 One should note here that while the Iban may kill hornbills for their meat and tail feathers, they will not touch their nesting holes (*tansang*) (Richards 1981: 155).
- 21 Nyuak, describing this sequence, writes:
- "then follows the dance with the *kenyalang* which they call by giving it food to eat. Two of the carved figures are taken first by two chiefs, who sway them about backwards and forwards, advancing and receding, with the cry: 'He! He! Ha! Ha! He! He! Hu! Hu!'. This continues throughout the night, during which the various family rooms are entered by the dancers who beg rings and cups as payment for placing the bird figures on their pedestals, on until the morning" (Nyuak 1977: 220).
- 22 It is perhaps significant in this context that Freeman specifically mentions that the *kenyalang* 'icon' is always carved by men (1960b: 100).
- 23 It should be noted here that in an early paper on the subject of birds and men in Borneo, Harrisson has the following remarks to say about the nesting habits of the hornbill:
- "There are two things about this entirely hornbill technique which lie close to the deep roots of much Dayak *ethos*:
 i) treating the female more toughly than any man can;
 ii) the idea of breeding in a dark, enclosed chamber, which relates profoundly to much of Bornean belief in the two worlds, over and under, linked by a dark, hidden tunnel in the journey between life and death, wake and dream, self and spirit, Dayak and 'half-Dayak' [sic]; - bird and man - and soul"
- (Harrisson 1960: 27)
- In this instance he would appear to touch upon the very same issues that I have discussed above, albeit in a somewhat uncertain manner. Subsequently, however, he neglects to follow up this particular line of inquiry, preferring to concentrate instead on a largely speculative idea of the hornbill as leader of the avian world.
- 24 Jensen, in fact, sees Lang as another instance of Hindu influence. He writes:

"In appearance and habits Lang corresponds almost exactly to the description of *Garuda* (Dubois 1959: 640) venerated by the Hindus. The significance of Sengalang Burong in Iban religion certainly implies Hindu influence. It is especially remarkable since Lang is not, strictly speaking, an Iban omen bird ..., although he occupies a key place among the Iban spirits" (1974: 83).

- 25 n.b. there is a headhunting festival resembling the *gawai burong* in the Padi area of the Saribas which is known by the title *gawai ketusong* (lit. - hibiscus festival) (Richards 1981: 162)

- 26 These are often the legendary women weavers of Gellong, who are the wives of the headhunting heroes of Panggau Libau, and who, like their husbands, manifest themselves in the realm of man as snakes (Richards 1981: 361)

- 27 n.b. an important category of blankets used for ritual occasions - including, it should be noted, the ceremonial reception of newly taken heads (Sandin 1980: 85-86) - are denominated by the prefix *bali* (Richards 1981: 24). This term may, quite possibly, be related to the word *bali*, meaning primarily 'to change', or 'alter' (Richards 1981: 24) (c.f. *manang bali* - see pp. 375-76).

- 28 It is interesting to note in this connection that Keling, in the story of his marriage to Kumang - whom he meets in the course of one of his travels - announces his imminent departure for his homelands of Panggau Libau with the following words: "My time has 'run out', I must become something else" (Brooke Low, in Ling Roth 1896 I: 336). The suggestion here is that these words refer to the transformation of his 'self', a change of state, or being, that has come about in conjunction with his travels and sojourn in distant lands - in this particular instance, the kingdom of Raja Rimau, father of Kumang.

- 29 Iban warriors in the oral literature are invariably described as *bujang*

- 30 The term *mata* and *mansau* are actually used to describe novitiate and initiated shamans (*manang*), a distinction which of course itself involves a similar transformation of status.

- 31 The officiant need not necessarily be a shaman - "Any adult male of the community of the deceased or from another community is eligible" (Uchibori 1978: 114).
- 32 It is reported that trophy heads are sometimes placed in winnowing baskets (*chapan*) during the course of various rituals and ceremonies (Howell 1977: 92, 140; Sandin 1977: 56) which can be understood as linking the idea of trophy heads as the containers of seed with the fruits of the harvest that this seed produces.
- 33 Iban mortuary rites thus provide a good illustration of the continuing importance of headhunting in Iban religious life, despite the fact that at the time of writing it was over thirty years since the last heads had been taken (i.e. during the Japanese occupation of Sarawak)
- 34 In recent times the individual chosen for this task is frequently someone who has been on a lengthy journey or *bejalai* expedition (Howell & Bailey 1900: 48; Morgan & Beavitt 1971: 302-3; Richards 1981: 409). However, as we have seen, the custom of *bejalai* is in many respects regarded as the latter-day equivalent of headhunting, and thus there is still a certain degree of continuity with the past.
- 35 One is reminded of Beccari's remarks that "not infrequently a Dayak starts on a headhunting expedition by himself, as a relaxation or to wear off the effects of a domestic squabble, just as with us a man might go out rabbit-shooting to get over an attack of ill-humour" (1904: 46).
- 36 In this connection it is interesting to note that an alternative meaning of the term *parai* denoting death is 'sterile' or 'impotent' (Richards 1981: 254), for this can be interpreted as a reflection of the threat that death poses to the life of the longhouse community and its continuity in future years.
- 37 c.f. note 36 above
- 38 The ceremony of *muka ulit* could, however, be performed at a much earlier date, provided, of course, that a new head had been taken since the occasion of the death.

- 39 Sandin in his account of the *gawai antu* actually describes these chants as *nimang jalong*, which refers to the bowls (*jalong*) of 'sacred wine' (*ai jalong*) drunk in honour of the dead (see p. 210).
- 40 c.f. the inverted nature of Sebayán generally (see pp. 131-132).
- 41 It should of course be pointed out that the dead may, on occasion, offer advice and information to the living through dreams and visions, much in the same way that an individual might receive the assistance of a 'spirit helper', or *antu nulong*.
- 42 There is also another, similar ritual known as *pelian ngandau Limban*, or 'bridging the Limban river' (Richards 1981: 193,263), the Limban being another mythical river which is crossed by the dead on their way to Sebayán and which in some areas is seen as the boundary between the mundane world of the living and the mythical regions of the universe where the Iban afterworld is situated (Gomes 1911: 299; Sandin 1966: 61. 77, n.2; Richards 1981: 193, 263).

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

Jensen draws his study of Iban religion and society to a conclusion with the following observations:

"For the necessities of existence the Iban depend on their environment, which they know from experience that they cannot control. They look, however, for some explanation of the phenomena of life and the fact of death, and on this basis they attempt to achieve constructive relations with the forces which surround them. Their thought and action, not least their religious ideas and practices, are all bound up with Nature as we know it, and the scope and limits of human activity and influence within their particular environment" (1974: 208).

In this respect

Iban religion and mythology offer a world-view which enables them to make sense of events which would otherwise seem arbitrary, even capricious. It also makes it possible for the Iban to enter into a constructive relationship with the environment in which they live by taking appropriate action to forestall the undesirable or to restore desirable conditions when circumstances require" (1974: 209-10).

This world-view is oriented around a cosmological distinction between the realm of the "physical-human", on the one hand, and that of the "spirit", on the other (Jensen 1974: 211). For Jensen, these differing levels of experience, or domains of existence, are but "two facets of a complementary view of the universe which characterizes Iban thinking [where] both parts of life contribute to the whole" (Jensen 1974: 211).

Thus,

"[t]here is no real dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, since these are two aspects of an integrated world-view. Just as human being can be classified in two: men and women, each with separate and distinct characteristics but of comparable value, so the spirit and physical members of the world have different modes of expression and different powers while belonging to the same universal order" (Jensen 1974: 211).

In this respect then, Jensen argues, there is an idea of "balance inherent in the complementary universe" (1974: 211), and it is this abstract cosmological principle, or figure, which for him "characterises Iban thinking and underlies the total order" (1974: 211).

The idea of a "total order" - social as well as physical - which is ultimately derived from a cosmological notion of a bifurcated universe, can, I have argued, be directly linked to the theoretical perspective of the Leiden School of Anthropology, and more recently, to the issues taken up by Oxonian structuralist studies (pp. 11-12). In particular, it seems that Jensen may have been especially influenced by Schärer's work on the Ngaju Dayak of South Eastern Kalimantan, whose society and cosmology are described by him as consisting of a "duality dissolved in ... unity" (Schärer 1963: 18; see also pp. 20-21 n.7). While this kind of analysis

may well be applicable to the Ngaju material, to what extent do such observations hold good for Iban society and culture? That is to say, how valid is Jensen's idea of a complementary universe in the light of the ethnographic record? How justified are his notions of a total order and an inherent balance, permeating through Iban thought and religion? And, in the final analysis, just how informative is a dualistic interpretation of Iban society and culture when dealing with such complex issues as the relationship between headhunting and fertility, or the special significance of plants in Iban healing rituals?

The first thing to note in this connection is the ease with which one can arrange the Iban ethnography into a two-column table in the manner of a Leiden or Oxonian structural analysis. For example, we can compose the following set of "complementary pairs": male/female; headhunting/agriculture; Lang Sengalang Burong/Pulang Gana; sky/earth; society/the world 'out there'; domestic/wild; living/dead; physical/mystical; and so on. In this particular instance, the first four pairs can be readily linked to one another in that Lang Sengalang Burong is the Iban god of war who lives in the sky realm of Langit whence he presides over the headhunting activities of Iban men, while conversely, Iban rice farming may be seen as primarily the work of women, requiring the divine assistance of Pulang Gana who, in his role as paramount god of agriculture, has close associations with the soil. Similar connections can also be established between the latter four pairs of terms, and these evident correspondences may engender the feeling that we are in fact dealing with a 'systematic' ordering of the material.

The second point to note is that, in some instances, the terms involved may indeed be said to complement one another, in the sense that

together they 'complete a whole'. For example, men and women complement each other in relation to the human species and its reproduction (although the picture may in fact be complicated by the existence of transvestite shamans or *manang bali*'). Similarly, headhunting may be said to complement rice farming and childbirth as the male component in a cycle of human and agricultural fecundity. Or again, the living and the dead complement one another in that together they exhaust the possible states of human existence, although in this instance one may encounter problems with the multiple definitions of the term *antu*.

The Iban material, then, is such that a number of cultural elements, or categories, can quite easily be put together in the form of paired associations, some of which may be complementary in nature, whether logically speaking - as in the case of male and female - or else conceptually, as in the case of headhunting and reproduction. Furthermore, one finds that in certain instances, one is even able to group some of these pairs together so as to create a *set*, or *sets*, of related associations. To suppose, however, that this possible arrangement of the material speaks of a fundamental schism in Iban thought in the manner that Jensen has suggested is quite another matter altogether.

At this point it is salutary to reflect for a moment upon some of the ideas and assumptions that lie behind the notion of dualism as an analytical precept. Oxonian structuralism can arguably be seen as a synthesis of two theoretical traditions - the one Dutch, the other French. I have already referred to the Leiden School and its close identification with the study of Malay and Indonesian societies; the French influences, on the other hand, are of course those of Lévi-Strauss and the school of structural analysis that sprang directly from his studies of myth and

totemism. Interestingly, both these scholastic traditions can ultimately be linked to a single source of inspiration - namely the works of Durkheim and Mauss and *L'Année Sociologique*. Thus Dutch scholars' in the early decades of this century were impressed by Durkheim and Mauss' theorizing on the connection between "primitive classification" and social organization (1903), while Mauss' principle of reciprocity (1924), can be identified as the starting point and philosophical basis for Lévi-Strauss' view on the origins of social behaviour (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 70, 83)².

In the latter instance one finds that, at one stage, Lévi-Strauss actually supposes dual organization to be the primary mode of classification (1969: 82). Basing his arguments on the wide and diverse range of ethnographic material collected for his Elementary Structures of Kinship, he writes that "we can see emerge, on a purely empirical level, the notions of opposition and correlation basic to the definition of the dualistic principle, which is itself only one modality of the principle of reciprocity" (1969: 83). In this respect, he suggests, "perhaps it must be acknowledged that duality, alternation, opposition and symmetry, whether presented in definite forms or in imprecise forms, are not so much matters to be explained, as basic and immediate data of mental and social reality which should be the starting-point of any attempt at explanation" (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 136).

The principal difference, then, between Dutch and French structuralism can be understood as a question of emphasis. Both share a common interest in the idea of a social and cultural order based on ideological opposition and duality; but while Dutch scholars may be seen as having concentrated upon a conscious, manifest order, as revealed by their ethnographic investigations, Lévi-Strauss and his followers have

taken the opposite approach and chosen to make the study of the unconscious creation of order of primary importance. Thus the French and Dutch schools of structuralism can ultimately be thought of as constituting two sides of the same coin; the Dutch providing the French with empirical data, and in return receiving a "philosophy of the mind" (c.f. Lévi-Strauss 1956).

It is precisely at the point where these two theoretical traditions coincide that one sees the emergence of contemporary Oxonian structuralism. That is to say, it occupies the space where these two offshoots of *L'Année Sociologique* re-convene. This is readily acknowledged by Needham, who, in one of his earliest attempts to address the problem of "complementary dualism", writes that his analysis "derives from the work of Durkheim and Mauss and of Hertz, and nearer to our time takes as models the publications of the Leiden school, ... and latterly the stimulating analyses of Lévi-Strauss" (1973: 124)⁸. But just how valid are these models? To what extent can the mental operations that Lévi-Strauss speaks of, be linked to cosmological formulations and the ordering of society? And does the existence of a number of binary discriminations within a given culture necessarily reveal the presence of a binary principle of classification and thought?

For the moment, let us grant the assumption implicit in the structuralist argument that the ability to distinguish, and the ability to perceive resemblance, is basic in some form or other to all cognitive processes. That is to say, cognition requires an ability to distinguish figure from ground, together with an awareness of discontinuity, which can be expressed logically in the form 'A', and 'not A'. But while Lévi-Strauss may be justified in supposing binary opposition (i.e. contrast) to be

fundamental to thought, there is no reason as such to link this primary feature of the cognitive process to the ordering of society as Lévi-Strauss does when he derives binary classification from a principle of reciprocity which is itself a *social* relation (above). Nor, in allowing the recognition of resemblance, does it follow that ways of perceiving or organizing perceptions are fixed and monothetic.

In an interesting discussion of binary classification as a theoretical precept, Hallpike has reviewed the way in which 'pairs', of one sort or another, may be constructed (1979: 224-34). Briefly, there are seven situations that lead to the generation of a pair of terms or categories. These are: differentiation, boundaries, relationships, breaks, scales, axes, and reversible motion. All of these rely on differentiation, but differentiation itself need not imply any of the others. That is to say, differentiation is a cognitive or perceptive act that simply distinguishes one thing from another, as in the case of figure from ground, or one class of thing from another. Thus differentiation, may or may not, involve the drawing of a boundary, but a boundary necessarily involves differentiation. Nor need differentiation imply a relationship between the things distinguished (for example, there is no relationship between a newspaper and a bar of soap), but in the case of a break (which is similar to a boundary), a part-whole relationship is involved. Then again an axis - which resembles a boundary in that it is conceptual involving a rotation around the axis, movement or variation - of the scalar type - along it, or an orthogonal relationship with other axes. Finally, movement itself creates yet another type of pair-reversibility, both circular and linear.

Hallpike sums up these various forms of binary discrimination with the following observations:

"there are a number of situations that generate pairs but are not reducible to the conceptual or perceptual act of differentiation. We may say that differentiation, relationship, boundary, break, axis, and reversibility of motion or variation are all mutually irreducible, and are all basic situations producing pairs, whether similar or dissimilar. It is also plain that these situations may exist at the levels of logical classification, imagery, perception, action, in the physical organisation of the world, or in a combination of any these" (1979: 226).

These pair-producing situations lead to the creation of five principal types of pairs, although there is no direct correlation between a situation and the type of pair produced. These five types of pairs are as follows:

- i) the logical pair (contradictory 'A', and 'not A') - together they exhaust the domain of classified elements and do not allow any intermediaries, e.g.: human and non-human; ii) the contrary pair - these are scalar and do not exhaust the domain of classified elements between them, e.g.: hot and cold; iii) the complementary pair - these are inherently part-whole types, distinguished by a break rather than a boundary, and may be related logically (i.e. one term implies the other), e.g.: husband and wife, or else functionally, e.g.: lock and key; iv) associates - those pairs whose elements are related simply because of some empirical conjunction, i.e., they are purely contingent and not logically or otherwise related, e.g.: butter and toast; and v) dissociates - here the elements are merely seen to be different, but not necessarily contrary, e.g.: village and jungle.

In addition to these five principal types of pair, Hallpike also includes two further categories - the symmetrical and the asymmetrical

pair. In doing so, he points out that these terms are often applied to similar and dissimilar complementary pairs respectively, but argues instead that "it seems analytically more useful and precise to treat these properties as inherently topological, that is, derived from the relationships of order and inclusion so that symmetrical order is produced by rotation round an axis or by the bisection of a regular figure" (1979: 227). In this respect, "it is an evident fact that some aspects of physical structures are symmetrical, as in the bilateral symmetry of many organisms, and others asymmetrical, as in the relation of head and feet" (Hallpike 1979: 227).

In summary then, we have seven pair-producing situations, and also seven types of pairs (including symmetric and asymmetric forms). Given this wide range of possible ways to make up pairs, it is not difficult to find binary 'classification' everywhere, through the reduction of a variety of different kinds of relations to a single, abstract, configuration - namely an 'opposition' (c.f. pp. 13). At this point one must inevitably query the justifications for constructing tables of endlessly 'opposed' terms when the nature of their 'opposition' may differ significantly from one pair of terms to another. In this last respect even the idea of an analogical correspondence uniting the pairs of terms that are included in such a table (Needham 1980: 51), would seem to be somewhat tenuous, especially when the semantic evaluation of individual terms is taken into account, together with the different emphasis that may emerge in changing contexts. This is not to deny the possible existence of systematic and comprehensive schemes of binary classification altogether - the ancient Chinese division of the world between *yin* and *yang* is one such example. In the case of the Iban material, however, a great deal more needs to be

shown, other than simply to demonstrate the possibility of organizing various social and cultural categories into pairs and then presenting these 'associated' terms in the form of a two-column table. Quite simply then, the present evidence does not warrant the inference of an inherent dualism in Iban thought and society, while Jensen's idea of a cosmic 'balance' pertaining between the two halves, or facets, of a divided universe appears in this light to be even less credible.

In rejecting Jensen's somewhat contrived, or mannered, characterisation of Iban thought and society, one is faced, of course, with the problem of finding something to put in its place. This search for an alternative model of Iban social life and culture is seriously hindered by the constraints of library research which *ipso facto* preclude the possibility of gathering further information, or opening up new lines of inquiry in the field. It is not a completely hopeless state of affairs, however, for as I have indicated there are ways by which one can come to terms with the extant ethnographic record, which do not in themselves rely excessively upon unwarranted, or unqualifiable, inferences on the part of the analyst. Having said this, one should perhaps note a most fundamental assumption that underlies all anthropological endeavour, namely that the vagaries and complexities of an alien society and cultural tradition can actually be reduced - with varying degrees of success, it is granted - to a (relatively) coherent model, or scheme of things. So much is obvious, but the ultimate presuppositions that underlie any form of analysis, or explanation of the world, are relevant here. That is to say, it follows from this initial assumption that Iban social life is subject to certain regularities, and that there is a degree of consistency, or congruence, pertaining to the views and emotional orientations of individuals within

that society⁴. This 'agreement', or 'accord', may be expressed in a variety of different ways which are drawn together by the anthropologist under the heading of collective representations. These are commonly regarded as culturally ordained means, or points of reference, by which individuals are able to structure and make sense of their experience of the world, and then communicate this understanding to their fellows. Attention should, however, be drawn again to the distinction between collective representations and individual belief or ideation: it is one thing to make use of a particular mode of representation to express a point of view, or organize a set of experiences, and quite another to actually believe that 'this is the way things are'. As far as our present interests are concerned, the idea throughout has been that Iban collective representations can, for the purposes of analysis, be thought of as a kind of 'text', or commentary, relating to the circumstances of Iban existence. This interpretation of collective representations is, I submit, both legitimate and informative as our concern has been with such forms as ritual, myth, and social practice, where the issue is not so much what collective representations *are*, as how they are *used*. The subsequent findings of such an inquiry, however, should not be conceived as necessarily reflecting any deep-seated psychological or cognitive predilections of the Iban mind.

These, then, were the initial premises adopted in starting out upon this re-examination of the Iban ethnographic record. It soon becomes apparent, however, that Iban collective representations, like many 'literary' works, regularly exploit a particular idiomatic style, or mode of representation, which acts as the principal vehicle through which key cultural concerns and interests are 'presented', 'discussed', and ultimately

'resolved'. I refer here, of course, to the Iban predisposition towards plant and botanical images, which are found in such great profusion throughout the oral literature, as well as the everyday use of language. This is not to suggest that the world of plants is the only source of imagery which the Iban regularly use; nevertheless, it is the most conspicuous and prevalent - a fact which is perhaps not surprising in view of the intimate relationship or bond that exists between the Iban and their natural environment. In this last respect, one might therefore be inclined to agree with Jensen's remark that Iban "thought and action, not least their religious ideas and practices, are all bound up with Nature as we know it" (1974: 208; above). One must, however, be careful to draw a distinction between "Nature as we know it", and Nature as the Iban 'know it'. That is to say that Iban ideas and attitudes towards the 'natural history' realm of plants may differ quite significantly from our own, and that in this respect one should be wary about superimposing our own understanding and evaluations of the plant kingdom onto those of the Iban.

The extent of this divergence between our own view of the plant kingdom and that of the Iban is clearly evident in the frequent Iban assertion, or implicit supposition, that their own lives are in some way comparable, or bound up, with those of plants - if not in a strictly physical sense, then at least in some form of sympathetic relationship, based upon a putative affinity between human and plant forms of life. Most immediately, this imagined correspondence between man and plant manifests itself in the collective representation of personal health and well-being as a function of the supposed state of growth of a mystical plant counterpart (*ayu*, or *bungai*). Similar images of plant growth and decay feature in ritual procedures that are designed to encourage longevity

(*gayu*). In the latter instance, however, it seems that the correlation between man and plant is seen more in terms of an analogical correspondence, the idea of a vegetal counterpart being absent in this particular context. Conversely, the concept of *sukat*, or life-span, would seem to be almost identical to that of *ayu* and *bungai*, being again described in terms of a mystical plant entity, growing on a hillside near that of the *ayu*. In short, man's corporeal existence is, for the Iban, regularly conceived in terms of a botanical scheme of things - a scheme which at the same time provides them with a model for actively dealing with physical affliction and the vagaries of disease and death.

The association of man and plant is not, however, restricted simply to botanical representation of human health and vitality, for the concept of a mystical plant-soul also provides the Iban with a powerful image for the portrayal of family life and the relative status and position of the individual in relation to the rest of society. I refer here to the notion that the *ayu* (or *bungai*) of individual family members grow together in clumps, or as shoots from a single stem (*pun*). This, I have argued, can be interpreted as a reflection of Iban ideas and principles relating to the nature of the *bilek*-family as a social institution, testifying to the individual identity and integrity of the *bilek* as a discrete and autonomous entity within the fabric of the longhouse community. In this respect it is especially interesting to note how for the Iban the physical is integrated with the social; that is to say the personal health and well-being of individual family members is conjoined with the collective health and well-being of the family as a whole, thereby defining the *bilek* as a corporate entity whose members share a common vested interest in a single estate.

Similar themes are also discernible at a more general level in the collective representation of the longhouse community *in toto*, and indeed the longhouse building itself, as a tree (*sekayau*), to which individual family units are attached as are branches to a single trunk (*batang*). In this instance, the wide range of social relationships that join individual families and their members together within the longhouse community, and which ultimately form the basis for family membership and recruitment, are imbued, at a representational level, with a kind of vegetable 'logic', whereby each family or individual is intrinsically linked to the whole and the pursuit of a common goal - namely the continued well-being and healthy 'growth' of the community. In other words, the Iban, like the ancient Greeks, conceive of their society as an organic entity - a metaphorical representation which speaks of the solidarity and united purpose of the longhouse community in relation to other such communities and the world in general.

This separation of the longhouse community from the rest of the world can also be discerned in the Ptolomaic nature of Iban cosmology, whereby the longhouse community is understood to be located at the 'centre' of the universe, and more remote geographical regions are perceived as bordering on a mythological realm 'peopled' by anthropomorphic gods (*petara*), spirits and demons (*antu*), legendary heroes (*orang Panggau Libau*), 'non-people' (*orang bukal*), and the dead (*antu Sebayau*). This scheme of things, which encourages the Iban tendency to see themselves as both different and 'superior' to other ethnic groups - a fairly common inclination one feels - has traditionally played an important role in the structuring of Iban daily life and the formulation of their relations with the rest of the world generally.

Much of the former is taken up with the cultivation of hill rice, which as we have seen, provides the Iban with their staple diet, and in times of surplus, constitutes a source of 'capital', or economic wherewithal, for the pursuit of various forms of social advancement. In this respect, the disinterested observer might well regard Iban agriculture simply as an economic undertaking; as far as the Iban themselves are concerned, however, rice farming is vastly more significant, involving complex notions of ethnicity and identity.

These views manifest themselves in the reverential attitude of the Iban towards rice, and the special significance that is attached to its cultivation and consumption generally. Several different themes are involved in the 'religiosity' that surrounds Iban rice farming and these extend in different directions. First there is the idea that rice plants are vivified and made fertile by a vital essence or spirit - the *semengat padi*. Then there is the Iban view that their agricultural techniques are a kind of divine patrimony, and that the gods themselves take an active part in ensuring the success of the annual farming season. But most important of all is the notion that man and rice are somehow 'alike' - that the two spheres of existence stand in sympathy to one another - and that ultimately man and rice are linked as alternating stages in a single chain of being.

This supposed affinity between man and rice operates at two levels. On the one hand there is the idea of a mystical bond linking each *bilek*-family with its annual rice crop in such a way that the well being and social worth of individual families are seen to be commensurate with the relative success of their harvests. On the other hand, however, there also exists a more deeply rooted idea of affinity with rice, based in this

particular instance on a principle of mutual sustenance, and ultimately, the idea of a common or shared destiny.

As far as the first set of ideas are concerned, it is of course frequently the case that the prosperity and general well-being of a *bilek*-family can be directly linked to the success of their annual rice harvest. That is to say, that in a society where the cultivation of rice provides its members, not only with their staple diet, but also with the principal material means by which wealth and personal prestige can be acquired, it is inevitable that individual family fortunes depend very much upon the size of their harvest yield. For the Iban, however, this purely economic, or material, dependency, is translated into a mystical relationship whereby a family's 'spiritual' well-being and social worth are seen as being reflected in the state of growth of their rice crop, and in the relative success of their annual harvests. This correspondence between family health and fortune on the one hand, and on the other, the productivity of their rice fields, is not seen simply as an indication of the beneficence of the gods; rather it is conceived more in terms of a sympathetic relationship between man and rice which, it would appear, has something in common with the Iban conception of a symbiotic relationship pertaining between an individual and his or her *ayu* (or *bungai*). It should be noted, however, that whereas in the latter instance the notion of a plant-soul belongs strictly to a mystical level of explanation, in the present instance we are dealing with a readily observable set of vegetal counterparts - namely rice plants.

Something of the Iban attitude towards this supposed affinity between man and rice can be discerned in the numerous metaphorical assertions, or ritual strategies, that either explicitly or implicitly

identify various areas of human experience with some 'relevant' aspect in the life cycle of the rice plant. Thus one finds that the health and state of growth of rice is frequently described in terms of human physiology and life-stages (a reversal of the *ayu/bungai* scheme of things, where botanical categories provide the framework for an aetiology of sickness and disease and the circumstances of human mortality), while the *semengat padi* are said to congregate in a society that replicates the social order of the longhouse community.

One particularly important aspect of this supposed affinity between man and rice lies in the parallels that are drawn between the fertility of rice and the fecundity of women, whereby the imagery of pregnancy and female sexuality provides a vehicle for linking women cultivators with their crop (see also below). Ultimately, however, this close relationship of man and rice would seem to extend beyond a question of mere similitude to include the notion of a shared destiny, even a common identity. I refer here, of course, to the idea that the dissolute *semengat* of the ancient dead return to the realm of the living as dew (*ambun*) which is then absorbed by the growing rice crop, becoming incorporated into the rice grain and thereby giving rise to the common Iban assertion that rice is their ancestor (*aki-ini*).

The precise nature of these latter ideas remain, as I have stressed, unclear in the absence of a proper understanding of Iban metaphysics and ontology (see also below). Nevertheless, they illustrate very nicely the extent to which the Iban view their lives and individual destinies as being intimately linked to the cultivation of rice. Thus one finds that rice farming, at an ideological level, not only provides the Iban with an extensive set of categories and reference points around which their daily

lives and social relationships may be oriented, but in the final analysis, is actually incorporated into their understanding of the mortal nature of human beings and the ultimate fate of the *semengat*, or 'soul', following death.

But if Iban rice farming can be thought of as a vehicle for the structuring of a number of key cultural concerns and areas of social interest, one should of course bear in mind the fact that the cultivation of rice is at the same time the material means or basis upon which Iban society is principally founded. True, the Iban may, from time to time, be obliged to supplement their agricultural production with alternative food sources, and in recent times have adopted other livelihoods; nevertheless, as far as the Iban themselves are concerned, rice farming is still seen as representing the ideal way of life and as the principal means by which their daily needs should be satisfied. In this respect, Iban agriculture can be thought of as the plinth upon which the edifice of Iban society and culture is constructed - a point which gains significance in a historical context where one can argue that the adoption of rice farming (concomitantly with an iron-age technology) was almost certainly the most important single factor in instigating the emergence of a specifically Iban way of life at some time after the eleventh or twelfth century.

This special significance of rice farming in relation to Iban ethnogenesis is reflected both in the mythology and in the frequent Iban assertion that the most definitive feature of their culture is the cultivation of hill rice (*adat kami bumai*). In this last respect, rice farming, for the Iban, is a statement of ethnicity, being the chief point of departure from which the Iban set out to distinguish themselves from other Bornean peoples and similarly distance themselves from their remote

ancestors who lived in the jungle 'like *antu*' (*baka antu*). Thus, as Jensen has remarked,

"Rice to the Iban is not just a crop. Hill rice cultivation is their way of life, and has become, for the Iban, their hallmark" (1974: 151).

But if the cultivation of hill rice has traditionally played a central role in the Iban order of life, no less important was the institution of headhunting, whose ritual significance was closely linked to the annual rice cycle. This relationship between headhunting and agriculture, though discussed at some length by Freeman (1979), has not always been clearly acknowledged in the ethnographic literature. However, a careful examination of the collective representation of headhunting -- as variously portrayed in Iban mythology, invocation, ritual, and native exegesis generally -- reveals an elaborate set of images and associations linking the taking of heads to the fertility of both rice and, by extension so to speak, women. Furthermore, one finds that these various associations are structured in such a way that headhunting emerges as a 'necessary' precondition for ensuring the success of these two related cycles of reproduction.

The issue that concerns us in this instance, then, is one of causation. That is to say, our interest here lies in discerning just how it is that the Iban are able to perceive some kind of link between the decapitation of distant enemies and the fertility of their rice and women. In short, how is such a scheme of things structured by Iban collective

representations of headhunting, agriculture and childbearing, and what are the conceptual prerequisites that allow such connections to be made?

Needham has admirably demonstrated the way in which past theories of headhunting have almost invariably resorted to a mechanistic model of cause and effect, and how in doing so, they have inevitably been forced to conjure up the notion of a quasi-physical entity such as 'soul-substance', or some similar fiction, which, on subsequent investigation, cannot be supported by the existing ethnographic record, or else appears totally unrecognizable to the very persons who are supposed to adhere to such beliefs. Needham summarizes his findings in the following way:

"Theories about headhunting have commonly relied on the idea that the severed head is thought to contain a mystical substance or force which emanates into the environment and thus enhances fertility and well-being. Examination of the ethnographic sources finds little convincing evidence for this view, and field enquiries have not confirmed that this is the indigenous explanation in Borneo. The conclusion is reached that there need be no intermediary factor between taking heads and acquiring prosperity. The nexus has been mis-interpreted by anthropological commentators, who have interpolated a fictitious entity between the cause and the effects. The failure to recognise an alternative conception of causality is accounted for by reference to the scientific tone of thought and the mechanistic idiom in which the commentators were educated" (1976: 71) (see also pp. 335-336).

But in rejecting previous interpretations of headhunting on the grounds that they rely too heavily upon western assumptions about the nature of causation - assumptions that do not readily 'fit' with the ethnographic evidence - one is faced with the problem of identifying a truly indigenous model of causality - i.e. one where the arguments concur with native exegesis on the subject of taking heads and its supposed

effects. It is at this point that the approach adopted in the present study becomes especially relevant, for if nothing else we have been able to show how the realm of headhunting can be systematically linked to Iban theories of fertility and female reproduction by means of an extended series of metaphorical associations and allegorical equations. As elsewhere, one again confronts the problem of interpreting the precise nature of these connections in the absence of a proper understanding of Iban metaphysics and indigenous notions of identity and so forth. Nevertheless, the fact that we are able to show the kinds of ways in which the Iban join the taking of heads to the increase of rice and the fertility of women, and to establish the specific images that they resort to in this respect, is, I submit, a great step forward towards a new understanding of headhunting as a cultural phenomenon.

To elaborate, cause, by definition, implies a connection. This need not be mechanistic in nature, as previous interpreters of headhunting seemed to have assumed, but nevertheless it is apparent that if one thing, or event, is said to be the cause of another, then inevitably there must be some way of linking these two otherwise separate phenomena to form a 'chain' of cause and effect. As will have been evident from our earlier discussion of scientific 'objectivity' and the nature of observation (pp. 48-50), one can never be absolutely certain that one thing is the cause of another - there is the striking example of two clocks keeping perfect time, but with one slightly lagging behind the other so that the first clock would appear to be exerting a 'causal' influence over the motions of the second, which is of course not at all the case⁵. Nevertheless, there are certain regularities of nature which allow us to infer a causal

connection between various things and events, and it is these regularities, or correspondences, that we are primarily interested in here.

My argument rests on the notion that there are many worlds, or 'realities', as there are coherent ways of describing them. Ultimately the only yardstick by which one can judge whether one particular version is a 'better', or more 'accurate', representation of 'reality', or the 'truth', is the extent to which it is able to satisfy a specific purpose or use. In Popperian terms, one scientific theory is better, or more valid, than another, if it explains all that an existing theory purports to explain and something else besides, but this does not necessarily imply that the more successful theory in this respect is somehow closer to describing the world 'as it is', than the discarded hypothesis. Indeed, a previously discredited theory may subsequently be re-instated in the light of more sophisticated methods of observation or analysis (see, for example, Chalmers's account of the Copernican revolution [1982: 31-2, 67-74]). That is to say, no 'explanation' of the world can be regarded ultimately, as ever more than an interpretation, whose validity, or 'accuracy', lies in the degree to which it concurs with, or is congruent to, a particular set of experiences, or 'known' facts (remembering of course that the word fact comes from the Latin *factum*, out of *facere* - to make).

The point that I am making here is that it is possible to divide up reality in any number of different ways, each version being based upon a particular assembly of the 'facts'. It follows then, that with these different construals of reality, there comes the possibility of inferring different sorts of connections between things and events - inferences that may or may not be commensurate with alternative world-views. It is precisely at this moment that the idea of metaphor and the implications of

metaphor theory come to the fore, for the success of a metaphorical utterance depends upon the assumption that some form of resemblance - or connection - can be found between two otherwise apparently separate, or distinct, domains. So, while it may be impossible for us to conceive of a causal connection between the taking of heads and the fertility of rice and women, by treating Iban collective representations as a series of cultural 'metaphors' we are able at last to identify the sorts of connections that the Iban themselves make between these otherwise distinct spheres of activity. In other words, the idea throughout has been that a systematic analysis of indigenous metaphors and equations will allow us to map out the different ways in which the Iban connect up, or fit together, the various categories and frames of reference that collectively constitute the principal terms, or vocabulary, through which their particular conception, or vision, of the world is presented. Following on from this, the fact that we are able to perceive the way the world is constructed for the Iban, should therefore enable us to grasp some understanding of what are specifically Iban models of connection, aetiology and association.

Having said this, it must be pointed out that merely to have demonstrated that there is a connection between two things or events, is not necessarily to have revealed the existence of a causal relationship. That is to say, that while 'cause' presupposes the existence of a connection, a connection does not presuppose a causal link. In other words, there is the possibility that in examining the Iban portrayal of a certain relationship between the taking of heads on the one hand, and the fertility of rice and women on the other, we may in fact be dealing with *logical* models of the world, rather than causal ones.

To elaborate, the suggestion in this particular instance is that the collective representation of Iban headhunting as the male aspect, or component, of an otherwise primarily female mode of reproduction (in that the increase of rice is identified with pregnancy and childbirth), may be thought of as constituting a logical 'solution' to a cultural 'problem', or query. That is to say, the Iban representation of trophy heads as seed-bearing fruit, or alternatively, children, might in certain lights be seen as a response to an (unstated) Iban riddle, namely,

"Why do women have children with pain and at the risk of death, and also undertake the most arduous task of the annual rice cycle, when men have children without pain and/or the risk of death, and at the same time are largely free from the irksome responsibilities of farm work?,"

the answer being, of course, that men must go headhunting instead.

I must at once acknowledge a debt to Hobart who puts forward this interpretation in an examination of Toradja headhunting practices (Hobart n.d.). In doing so, he himself refers to an earlier account of Samoan tattooing customs by Milner (1969), in which it is suggested that the answer to the question of why women should have children with pain and at the risk of death, while men do not, was the reply that 'when men grow up, they are tattooed' - a cultural practice that ritually replicates the (natural) processes of female parturition (Milner 1969: 15-21). Milner sees this as an instance of a Lévi-Straussian "answer for which there is no question" (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 119; cited in Milner 1969: 20); that is to say, it is a logical - though for Milner, largely intuitive - response to an unspoken cultural concern, or area of potential conflict (1969: 20-21),

being of the same order as the Nuer assertion that twins are birds (Milner 1969: 10-15).

There is, then, the possibility that Iban collective representations of headhunting are an essentially logical construction, and do not actually reflect Iban notions of cause and effect, being more to do with the satisfaction of an intuitive unease, or an intellectual disquiet, than the proposal of a causal explanation of events. Without further information from the field, however, it is not possible to decide in favour of either argument, which brings us back to the advantages of the present study and the methods that it employs. That is to say that in treating Iban collective representations as being largely metaphorical in content we have been able to circumvent the dangers of appealing to some hypothetical Iban collective consciousness, or process of thought, while still being able to make full use of the material in our search for a truly Iban view of the world built around the categories and terms of reference that they themselves would employ.

Whether, of course, the Iban themselves see their collective representations as metaphorical in nature is another matter altogether. As I have indicated, it is not one that can be properly entered into without a greatly improved understanding of Iban metaphysics and notions of identity, being, substance and so forth, which is an area of study that calls for further inquiry in the field. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the existing ethnographic record does provide some interesting clues as to the ways in which the Iban might interpret the data. For example, in some instances the Iban would appear to favour a largely metaphorical rendering of the material, as in the case of one informant who dismisses the concept of *bungai* 'plant souls' as simply a fiction (*kelulu* - lit. 'make believe')

[Richards 1981: 152]) of shamanic invocation (see p. 163). In other instances, however, one seems to encounter more of an ontological commitment to a particular set of representations, as in the case of the Iban assertion that rice is their 'ancestor', being constituted, in part, by the dissolute *semengat* of the ancient dead (above).

By way of conclusion, then, it is perhaps appropriate to reflect upon some remarks of Quine regarding the epistemological status of a physicist's world-view vis-à-vis that of the ancient Greeks. He writes:

"As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries - not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer" (Quine 1980: 44).

Quine goes on to add:

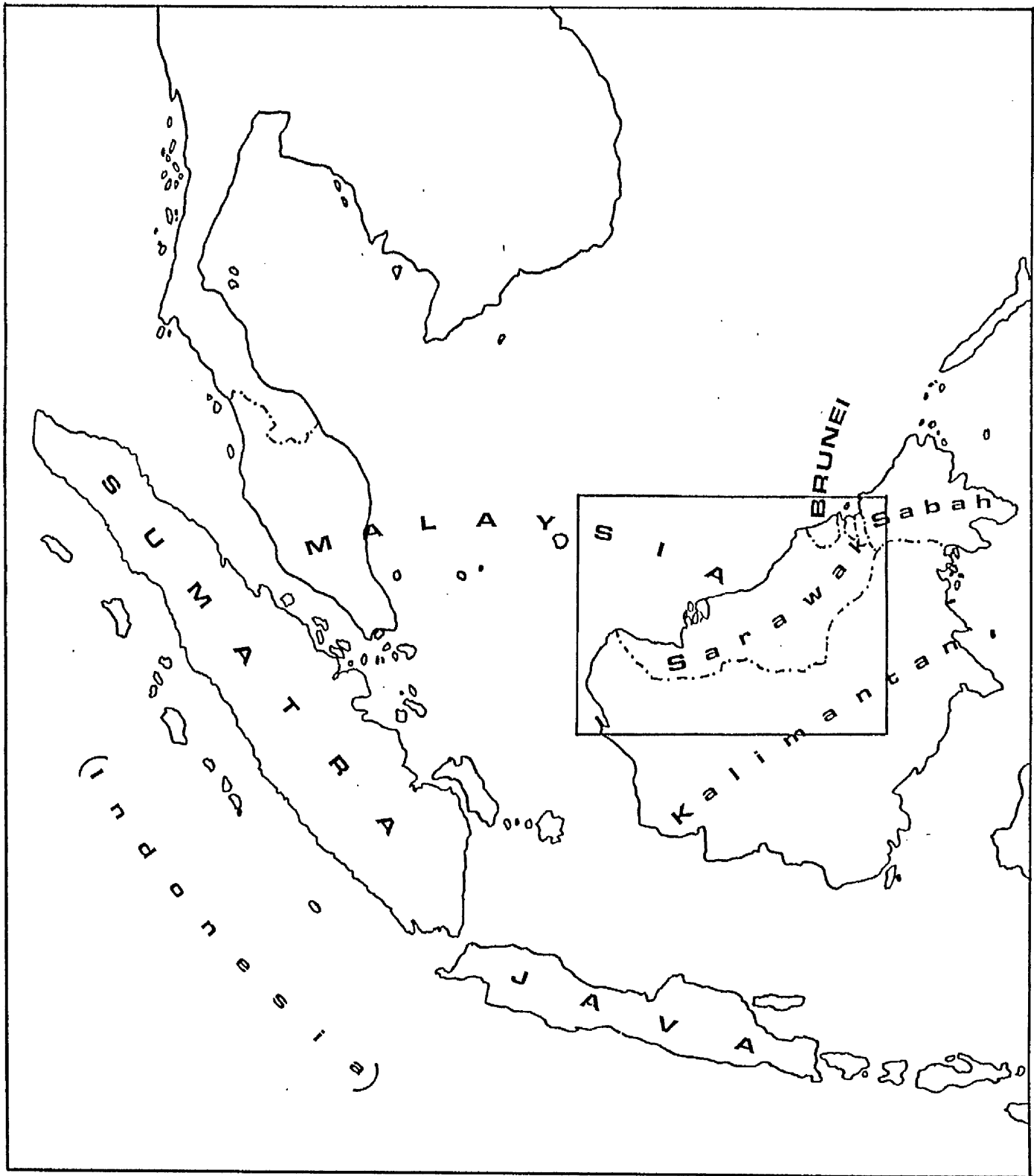
"For my part I do *qua* lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable into the flux of experience" (1980: 44).

For the Iban, however, the choice between Homer and modern science, until very recently, quite simply did not exist. Instead it was the world of Lang Sengalang Burong and Pulang Gana, of Keling and Kumang, of *antu* and *semengat*, which encompassed them, and which provided them with an

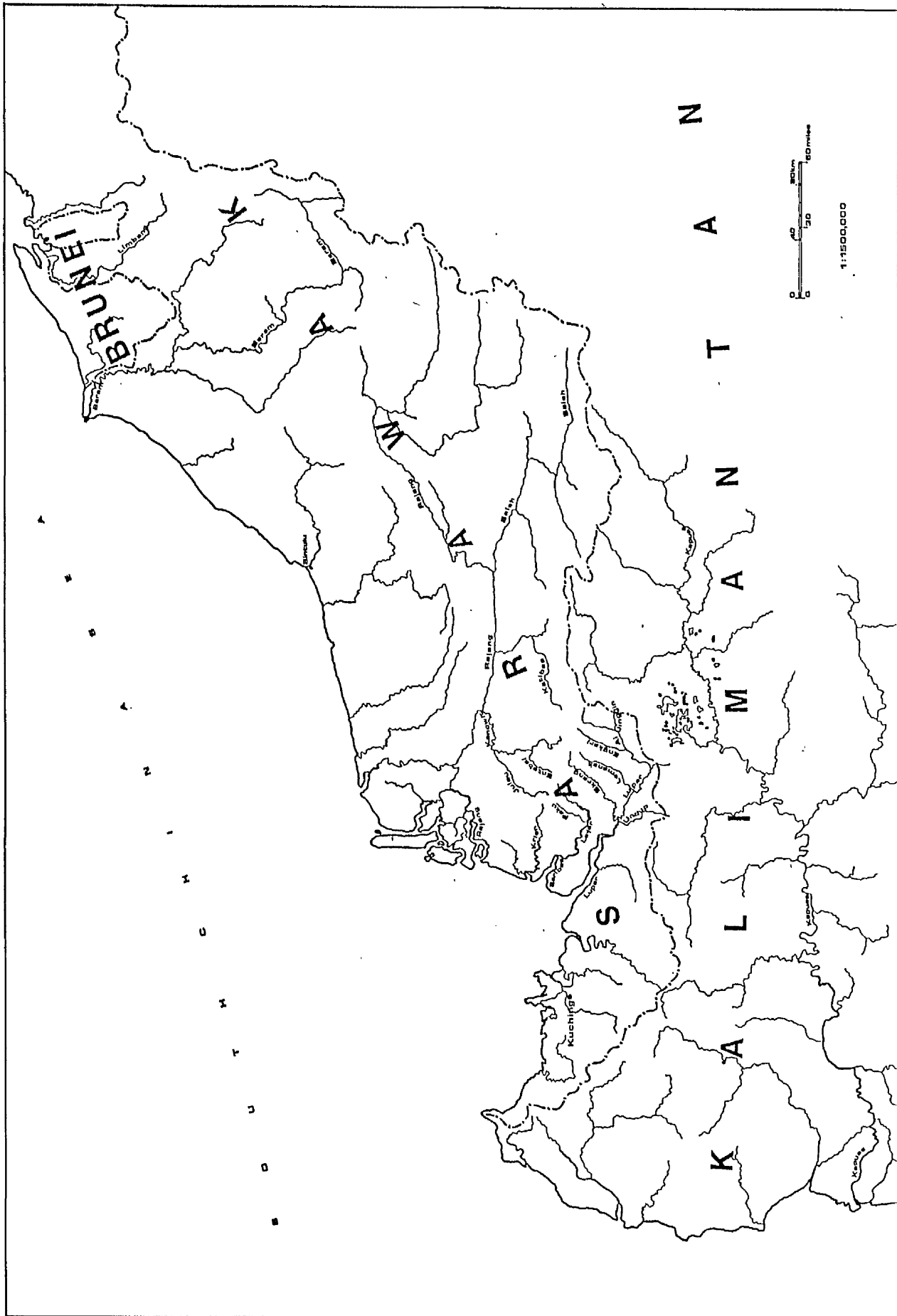
efficacious set of 'cultural posits' through which their daily lives and experiences could be structured and evaluated.

FOOTNOTES

1. For example, van Ossenbruggen 1918, Rassers 1922.
2. n.b. Lévi-Strauss was in fact a pupil of Mauss.
3. The specific works that Needham refers to in his notes are Durkheim & Mauss' treatise on primitive classification (1903), Hertz' essay on the pre-eminence of the right hand (1907), Rassers' study of the Javanese legend of Panji (1922), and Lévi Strauss' structural analyses of myth (1955, 1958).
4. One should of course bear in mind at this point Wallace's sceptical "inquiries into the psychic unity of human groups" and his interesting refutation of the implicit anthropological assumption that "cognitive sharing [is] a functional prerequisite of society" (1970: 24-30).
5. Our means of knowing the connection to be false comes about because we are in a position to move or stop the clocks. Were this not so, the problem would be more difficult.



Map 1: Sarawak & surrounding regions.



APPENDIX A: Gods and Supernaturals

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Anda Mara | Brother of Lang Sengalang Burong <i>et al</i> ; associated with wealth and good fortune; particularly called upon at <i>gawai tajau</i> , or jar festivals. |
| Antu | "Generic term for all types of generally anthropomorphic supernaturals, including ghosts of the dead (<i>antu sebayan</i>), diverse minor sprites and more powerful demonic spirits, except for paramount deities and major tutelary spirits, called collectively <i>petara</i> " (Sather 1978b:313). |
| Antu buyu | Incubus spirit that can assume any form it pleases; its attacks are experienced as erotic nightmares which 'spoil' (<i>ayah</i>) the womb of their female victims, causing miscarriage or the death in infancy of children that may be subsequently born. |
| Antu gerasi | Demonic huntsmen of gigantic proportions and ferocious appearance, who roam the jungle with their hounds (<i>pasun</i>) and prey upon the lives of men; particularly associated with remote regions (<i>tisi langit</i> - the edge of the sky). |
| Antu koklir | The spirit of women who have died in pregnancy or childbirth; takes the form of a beautiful seductress who lures men into her embrace, only to emasculate them, tearing their testicles from their scrotum and eating them. |
| Antu lapar | Spirits of famine |
| Antu nulong | Benevolent spirit helper; often acquired by holding a night vigil (<i>nampok</i>) in some remote spot; reveal the whereabouts of magical charms and other useful information to their chosen beneficiaries, and assist them in their endeavours. |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <i>Antu padi</i> | In some regions, an alternative term for <i>semengat padi</i> , but for the Saribas Iban, at least, an unseen guardian presence that watches over the rice crop and avenges its injury or abuse. |
| Antu pala' | Head trophies. |
| Antu punas | Spirits of sterility and barrenness. |
| Antu rua' | Spirits of wastefulness. |
| Antu sebayan | The spirits of the dead; located in the Iban after world - Sebayan - an idealised replica of the real world, situated at the headwaters of the semi-mythical Mandai river; invited back to the world of the living on the occasion of a <i>gawai antu</i> , when they are commemorated by their surviving friends and relatives. |
| Bejampong | An omen-bird - crested jay (<i>platylophus galericulatus</i>) - and son-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong; also known as <i>burong jampat</i> (quick-moving bird), <i>burong gegar</i> (excited bird), and <i>burong gaga</i> (happy bird); sought as an auspicious omen for headhunting expeditions. |
| Bengkong | Tutelary spirit of head trophies who, in the chants accompanying Iban headhunting festivals, is described as being tricked by the omen-birds into giving up his prized possessions (portrayed in this instance as his 'children'), which are then brought by them to the festivities as gifts for their hosts. |
| Beragai | An omen-bird (<i>Harpactes duvaucelli</i> Temminck) and son-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong; also known as <i>burong tampak</i> , or 'bright bird', whose brilliant red breast is associated with renown; his call is described as being 'like someone who laughs' (<i>baka orang ketawa</i>) and is identified with success or triumph in warfare. |
| Benih Lela Punggang Tengian | Daughter of Pulang Gana. |
| Bikku Bunsu Petara | A subordinate of Bunsu Petara, who acts as his representative at longhouse festivals; sometimes included as a brother of Lang Sengalang Burong and Pulang Gana. |
| Bintang Tiga | Three stellar sisters who make up Orion's belt. |
| Bintang Tujoh | Seven stellar sisters who together make up the Pleiades; visited by Surong Gunting who is |

instructed by them as to the special significance of stars in relation to the timing of the agricultural cycle.

Bunsu Petara

Creator deity who, with his wife, fashioned the first human being from the trunk of a *pisang bangkit* banana tree; said to be too preoccupied with universal concerns to attend the festivals of men, sending Bikku Bunsu Petara in his place; also known as Allah Talla and Raja Entala, suggesting Islamic influences.

Bunsu Tikus

The vermin spirit, from whom Simpi Impang obtained the first rice seed. Also known as Indai Jebu.

Burong Malam

An omen-'bird' (in fact a species of cricket - *Gryllacris nigrilabris*); not always included as one of the sons-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong; an auspicious omen for war and cock-fighting.

Chang Chelawang

Father of Keling who acquired invisibility from a cobra and passed this remarkable quality on to his family and followers: this gave rise to the division between the legendary heroes of Panggau Libau (his descendants) and the forefathers of present day Iban, who chose to retain their visibility.

Dayang Peteri

A mythical female who brought about the end of the marvelous self-cultivating properties of rice when she attempted to take a hand in this hitherto unassisted sequence of events.

Embuas

An omen-bird - banded kingfisher (*lacedo pulchella*) - and son-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong; also known as *burong kasih* (kind bird), *burong berat* (loaded bird), and *burong celap* (cool bird); a good omen for farming and expeditions into the forest, but as *burong sinu'* (pitying bird) may foretell illness and death.

Empang Raga

Brother of Simpi Impang who helped him steal the first rice seed from Ini Raja Pipit.

Garai

Ulu Ai name for Manggin (see below).

Gua

Giant ogre (actually an *antu gerasi* - see above) who adopted Limbang as his son and heir, and whose head, when 'planted' on his death, gave rise to a fabulous tree bearing all kinds of marvellous fruit, including gold,

silver, iron, jars, silks and other items of economic or ritual value.

Ini Andan

Sister of Lang Sengalang Burong and the most important female deity in the Iban pantheon; guardian of the magical charms (*ubat jedian*) associated with the supernatural (post-harvest) increase of rice; ever-youthful beauty who is courted nightly, yet never marries, Ini Andan personifies the latent fertility of rice.

Ini (Raja) Pipit

Rice sparrow spirit who introduced Simpi-Impang to rice which he then stole from her (hiding the seed under his foreskin), thereby obtaining the first rice for mankind.

Keling

Greatest of the legendary heroes of Panggau Libau: invincible warrior, and champion of any contest, he epitomises the Iban conception of manhood and the stance that men should adopt.

Ketupong

Leader of the omen-birds - Rufous Piculet (*sasia abnormis*) - and senior son-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong; also known as *burong mangah* (fierce or angry bird) and *burong gegar* (excited bird) and in a favourable context signifies success in warfare.

Kuang Kapong

Indian Cuckoo (*cuculus micropterus* Gould); original leader of the birds until deposed by the rhinoceros hornbill (Kenyalang).

Kumang

Wife of Keling and paragon of female virtue and beauty.

Laja

Brother (-in-law) of Keling.

Lang Sengalang Burong

The Iban god of war and teacher of the adat code; "an amalgam of Jupiter and Mars, with a dash of Bacchus" (Freeman 1979:239); of heroic proportions and great strength despite his mature age; the most important single deity in the Iban pantheon; as custodian of the *adat*, the ultimate primogenitor of the Iban way of life.

Limbang

Brother of Keling who lost his way in the jungle only to be found and adopted by the ogre Gua; married the latter's daughter.

Manang Betuah

Alternative title for Menjaya Manang Raja (see below).

- Manang Jaban** One of the celestial shamans; called upon in rites for the sick.
- Menggin** Father of Surong Gunting (below); at one time married to Endu Dara Tinchin Temaga, a daughter of Lang Sengalang Burong, although himself a mortal; accompanied his son in the latter's search for his mother after she had returned home to the sky realm of Lang.
- Menjaya Manang Raja** A brother (sister) of Lang Sengalang Burong and the first *manang* or shaman; in some accounts changed his sex on taking office, giving rise to the concept of the transvestite *manang bali'*; called upon in rites for the sick when he/she is asked to tend the ailing *ayu* of the patient, or else retrieve their errant *semengat*.
- Menyayan** Alternative title for Menjaya Manang Raja
- Nabau** Mythical water serpent who is said to accompany great war leaders as their spirit helper (*antu nulong*), assisting them in their victories on the field of battle.
- Nendak** An omen-bird - white-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) - but not one of the sons-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong; also known as *burong celap* (cool bird) who is sought in this respect as an auspicious omen for farming.
- Nising** An alternative name for Bengkong (above) the tutelary spirit of trophy heads.
- Orang Pangau Libau** The legendary heroes of Iban mythology; Homeric figures whose actions and exploits exemplify Iban ideals of behaviour and demeanour.
- Padi Mati Bejalai Lemi Pinggang** The daughter of Kumang (above), who is born a widow, but then grows progressively younger in an allegorical representation of the annual rice cycle whereby the mature grain of one season becomes the seed of the next.
- Pangkas** An omen-bird - maroon woodpecker (*Blythipicus rubiginosus*) - and son-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong; also known as *burong panjong* (the bird who shouts out) and Kutok ('like someone who is always angry'); his triumphant cry foretells success in warfare.
- Papau** An omen-bird - Diard's Trogon (*Harporhynchus diardi*) - and son-in-law of Lang Sengalang

Burong; also known as *burong rabun* (unseen bird) and *burong bula* (deceitful bird); useful in warfare in assisting the deception of the enemy and blinding them to an attack.

- Petara** See Bunsu Petara (above); generic title for major deities such as Lang Sengalang Burong and the omen-birds.
- Pulang Gana** Brother of Lang Sengalang Burong and paramount god of Iban agriculture; born of Simpang Impang (or Petara) who delivered just blood which was then placed in a hole in the ground to constitute itself as Pulang Gana; owner of the earth and custodian of its generative powers.
- Raja Entalla** Creator deity who, together with his wife, fashioned the first man (couple) from the trunk of a *pisang bangkit* banana tree.
- Raja Samerugah** The father-in-law of Pulang Gana and ruler of a subterranean land; original owner of the soil whose dominion he ceded to his son-in-law on the marriage of his daughter.
- Raja Sua** Alternative title for Pulang Gana.
- Ribai** Crocodile spirit and possessor of the fruit of the fabulous Pauh Laba tree; always at war with Panggau Libau following a breach of promise regarding the hand in marriage of Kumang's daughter.
- Rintong Langit Pengulor Bulan** A spirit encountered by the omen-birds in their quest for the fruit of the mythical *ranyai* palm; he directs them to the house of Nising where they find what it is they seek.
- Selampandai** The 'maker of men'; portrayed as a blacksmith, fashioning men and women on his anvil; distinct from Bunsu Petara - the creator of the first man (above).
- Serapoh** Mortal who was instructed as to the correct procedures for the disposal of the dead.
- Serentum Tanah Tumboh** The wife of Pulang Gana and daughter of Samerugah; often invoked in agricultural rites.
- Simpang Impang:** Mother of Pulang Gana.
- Simpi Impang** A unilateral figure who obtained the first rice seed from Bunsu Tikus/Ini Rajah Pipit.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Simpulang Gana | Alternative title for Pulang Gana. |
| Siti Awa | Wife of the first man, whose daughter was cut up by them giving rise to all kinds of useful plants and vegetables. |
| Siti Permani | A daughter of the creator deity Petara who was dismembered at the creation to form parts of the vegetable kingdom including rice. |
| Siu | Alternative name for Menggin (above). |
| Surong Gunting | Son of Menggin and Tinchin Temaga (son-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong); journeys to the sky realm of Langit in search of his mother upon her return to the longhouse of Lang; instructed by Lang on the significance of birds, the art of warfare, the techniques of agriculture and the <i>adat</i> code; returns to the realm of man to impart this knowledge to his fellow men, and in doing so initiates the beginnings of Iban society and culture as traditionally conceived. |
| Tinchin Temaga | A daughter of Lang Sengalang Burong and mother of Surong Gunting; initially married to Menggin (above), then later Burong Malam (above); often singled out as being responsible for the headhunting expedition of the omen-birds by her refusal to attend the festivities of men without a fresh head trophy to present as a gift. |

A Note Concerning Appendices B, C and D:

The Iban are a non-literate people who nevertheless possess a rich and extensive oral tradition. The very nature of the latter inevitably means that there will be variation according to locality and schools of apprenticeship. The following transcriptions of Iban festival chants were recorded by Sandin in the Paku region of the Saribas. Unfortunately it is not possible to 'balance' these particular versions with similar material from elsewhere for the simple reason that there is none. Furthermore, the Saribas Iban are a rather special case (see pp. 76-77; 78-80). In this last respect it might be argued that the following extracts cannot be necessarily thought of as representative. But even if the imagery of these Saribas verses was found to be unique - which I very much doubt - the fact that they can be so readily linked to various themes that emerge from a more general consideration of Iban collective representations is, I suggest, in itself significant, and bespeaks a common "symbolic order" (Sather 1977a: 169) that is shared by all Iban communities.

APPENDIX B: Nengang Indu Dara

The material that is presented here is taken from Sandin's transcriptions and translation of the chants that accompany a *gawai umai* or farm festival (1967) (see p. 321 n1). The sequences that I have selected are those that specifically relate to the praise (*nenjang*) of Iban maidens (*indu dara*) (pp. 370-373) and adolescent girls (*indu angkat dara*) (pp.373-396), and should be read in conjunction with my discussion of the text in chapter 6 (pp. 308-316).

NENJANG INDU DARA

Uji nginsit mimit nuan rarit baku jalapa,
 Nyeliah nuan buah pinang saleka,
 Enggai ka kena embat tungkat engkalat buloh bala,
 Kena aku mansang nenjang anak orang,
 Ka betentang dudok bebanda.
 Ari sepiak nuan Endu adi Laja,
 Endu Pantang Mayang Mara.
 Ari Sapiak Selaku Kumbu Muau,
 Nya ga uchu Bujang Simpulang Gana,
 Ka tiga ngaum nuan.
 Kita ka sama ringang-ringang,
 Baka puchok tapang undang tepan labang madu banda.
 Ka aku ngelulu ka selangkoh tuboh benong raremba,
 Enggi kita ngagai rampai terabai niang Rekaya menya,
 Tang kitai tu ukai gaga ka leka balang begumba,
 Laban kitai nyangkai ga gawai Rangkang Kirai,
 Nyangkai ka kereja Raja Sua, nyeridi ka padi mela menoa,
 Tang salingkut mulut enggi bujang lemambang Ensilup,
 Tu nyau nyebut kita ke lelingut benong dara.
 Bujang lemambang Tepong Bulu tu enda tau bejako ngara berita,
 Leboh nuan ka agi di kandut sida indai nuan di perut kandang dada.
 Nya indai nuan ke bepenti mali makai lempis pais ikan juara,
 Sambilan bulan bepelam sapuloh malam baru nuan ada,
 Siang hari nyadi, malam meruan segenda nuan nyadi mensia,
 Udah nya nuan diberi orang mandi ka ai panchur ngelagua,
 Di kumbai ka orang Selampandai Raja Selampeta,
 Di padah ka orang Anda Mara.
 Nya alai orang ngaga ading piring chukop perengka,
 Biau orang enggau selanjau manok banda,
 Lalu dipandi ka orang ka ai panchor ngelagua,
 Di sungga ka Selampeta Siduai Raja Anda Mara,
 Lalu pulai penyurai rumah raya,
 Lalu di kujok orang enggau pelepok bali mensuga.
 Nya alai malam nya nuan bisi mimpi,
 Betemu enggau Lementan Kumang Inja,
 Mimpi betemu enggau Lulong bini Laja.
 Nuan lalu digaga ka sida tangkai berada nuan,
 Panggau ka begurau tuntun dada,
 Ke di samak enggau belabak jayau bunga,
 Sida Krian pen bisi ga mai pesan nusoi berita,
 Sida Rimbas pen bisi ga ngabas deka ngelala.
 Kitai Paku pen bela sampal nemu baka selama.
 Orang ari Layar bisi ga ngampar,
 Mai bekal chukop tengkira.
 Nya alai maich orang nuntong nuan,
 Di gendong papan pengala,
 Tang ka siko ga ka di bai nuan gali,
 Enda ga nya sengapa dia sebarang iya.
 Ngiga orang ka pugu antu' pun menoa,
 Ngiga orang ka bisi kereja sedia makai gaji.

Move a bit, you molded *jelapa* box,
 And move a little, you single areca-nut,
 Lest you be struck by the *engkalat* stick,
 Which is used by me to sing a song to the daughters of men,
 Who sit opposite one another.
 At your side is Laja's sister,
 On the other side is maiden Selaku Kumbu Muau,
 Who is recognised as the noble grand-daughter of Bujang Simpulang Gana,
 And the third is yourself
 All of you sitting gravely.
 Like the top of the *tapang* tree frequented by red bees.
 Should I liken your lovely bodies
 To the beautiful shield of the late Rekaya,
 We are not celebrating the joyful feast for the reception of human heads,
 But are celebrating the traditional feast of Rangkang Kirai,
 The feast of Bujang Raja Sua², who nourishes the padi and prays for the
 fertility of the land.
 But the proverbs told by me ,the relator(singer)of parables ³is now
 speaking about you young damsels.
 This shaman Tepong Bulu is not good in relating the story,
 When you were still inside the wombs of your mothers,
 When they undertook a vow not to eat the *juara* fish⁴,
 For nine months they kept the taboo and on the tenth night you were born,
 You were nurtured by day and night and you became human beings,
 Then they called for Selampandai Raja Selampeta and Anda Mara.⁵
 To partake of the various offerings,
 Which had been waved over by a red cock,
 Before they dipped in the rippling current,
 You were honourably bathed by Selampeta and Anda Mara.
 Then they returned to the longhouse,
 After they had planted on the ground the *letan* rods⁷ and flags.
 On arrival at the longhouse,
 You were covered with *bali mensuga* blankets,
 That night you will have a dream,
 Of meeting Lamentan Kumang Inja,
 And dreaming you met Lulong the wife of Laja.
 Your parents eventually made for you a bedstead,
 As high as a person's chest,
 On which they place a charm of scented flowers.⁸
 In due course the people of Krian heard about it,
 The Rimbas people came over to see what it was,
 While those of the Paku knew all about it,
 The Layar people also paid visits,
 Bringing with them things of all sorts.
 Therefore, many people came to see you,
 Sleeping on your beautiful bedstead.
 But it was only one that you wished for your couch,
 And not just any man.
 You are looking for a noble youngster,
 A man with very good prospects.⁹

NOTES

1. Laja - one of the legendary heroes Panggau.
2. Raja Sua - an alternative title for Pulang Gana.
3. Parables - *salingkut mulut* 'indirect speech (mouth)'.
4. This is a reference to pregnancy prohibitions.
5. This is a reference to the first ritual bathing of a newly born child (*mandi anak*) (see Howell 1977: 54, 56-57; Nyuak 1977: 184; Gomes 1911: 101; Jensen 1967: 175-6; Richards 1981: 206).
6. Selampandai Raja Selampeta, the deity responsible for the creation of the child in a mother's womb. Portrayed as a blacksmith, forging new human beings on his anvil; sometimes invoked at healing ceremonies and asked to remould the afflicted body of the patient. Another of the brothers of Lang Sengalang Burong and Pulang Gana (Perham 1882a: 145-6; Howell 1977: 20-21; Nyuak 1977: 176; Gomes 1911: 174; Basil 1949: 60-61; Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 261).
7. *Letan* rod - weaving heddle and archetypical female symbol (see for example in connection with imagery of *mandi anak* ritual above; c.f. the *ubat jedian* of Ini Andan p.216).
8. Scented flowers - *jayau bunga* - love charm to attract a distant sweet heart (see pp. 306-308 for discussion).
9. This section refers to the custom of *ngayap* or 'night visiting', whereby Iban bachelors may visit and sleep with their sweet hearts so long as this is carried out discreetly and they accept the obligation to marry the girl if she becomes pregnant.

Nenjang Indu Angkat Dara

Uji nginsit mimit, nuan rarit baku tanggong,
 Nyeliah nuan buah pinang ipong,
 Enggai ka nuan kena embat,
 Tungkat mengkalat buloh laung.
 Enggi anak Bujang Lemambang Luong,
 Mansang nenjang bala kita,
 Ke nyempayang dudok betugong.
 Laban lama anak Bujang Lemambang Kamba tu,
 Udah meda kita enggau rampa malik ngenong,
 Lama aku udah merening kita,
 Enggau jeling mata menchenong.
 Lama uman tu udah bayam kita,
 Enggau geman tengkurong rekong.
 Tang anak Bujang Lemambang Kesuiee tu,
 Udah besai penangi ati arong beradong.
 Laban lupu tu nyau udu malu,
 Dilempedu karong chantong.
 Laban tinda aku tu besai kawa,
 Meda kita ke bejumpa dudok betugong.
 Tang kati ko aku enda nenjang nuan deh,
 Endu Kumang dara lempong,
 Nga ga endang pantang,
 Kami Anak Bujang Lemambang Luong,
 Ke baru datai ari menoa raya kami,
 Ke di-tanjong ngeliong bekumbang.
 Nya alai sapa orang ke deka diadu ka aku,
 Berimbai enggau nuan dikerigai rusok rimbong,
 Sapa orang ke ditelah aku,
 Enggau dilah tengkurong rekong,
 Iya ke diasoh aku enggau nuan,
 Betinggang paah betigong patong?
 Nya alai ari kanan enggi nuan,
 Nya adi Renggan seduai endu adi Tutong,
 Nya ke dikumbai orang endu Dara Lulong,
 Indu orang ke datai ari Gelong Batu Benang.

Nya alai ari kiba enggi nuan,
 Adi Maga seduai endu adi Durong,
 Nya indu orang ke baru datai,
 Nyerumba karau betenggau ka beliau lampu gantong.
 Ari menoa raya sida iya,
 Di-Letong Jalong Temaga,
 Ke lepong-lepong nuju ka munggu,
 Di-gulu antu' enteli laki.
 Besabong ulu betumpu nanga,
 Enggau letong tambun miang.
 Nya ga lantang anak Bujang Rangkang Kirai,
 Anak umbong Raja Durong.
 Nyadi ari moa nuan,
 Diimbai Biku Bunsu Raja Petara,
 Ke ngemata ka kitai sakayu dunya,
 Ari baroh singka miga bekurong,
 Nya alai tak jendam meh kita enam,
 Dudok di-pandan tudong long.
 Tak linga-linga meh kita lima,
 Nyemela ka janga bau nyurong,
 Disema ka aku indah enda,
 Baka puchok kara nangka tumbuh dili dia,
 Wan Diba Gerasi Kamba dijarau Jimba,
 Pangka ka buah angin nyabong.
 Tak lenggi lenggi meh kita dudok besendi,
 Baka sawi ke tumbuh dulu tumbuh dili,
 Di ai rapi bedarong.
 Tak ringgang-ringgang meh kita Endun Kumang,
 Besendi ka lepi sanggol lintang,
 Indah enda baka puchok tapang begayang,
 Tumbuh dientigis ulu Rajang,
 Puchok iya ga nyempayang ka Badang,
 Nungkam ka Kayan Uma Lesong.

Move a little, thou decorated areca nut box,
 Step aside, thou *ipong* areca nut,
 So that you may not be struck
 By the stick of the bachelor Shaman ' Luong,
 Who sings the song of praise to you
 And who sits with you.
 The son of Shaman Kamba
 Has, with astonishment, long observed you.
 Long have I watched you,
 Whilst singing the songs welling from my throat.
 But this son of Shaman Kesuiee
 Has been timid hearted
 And has left ashamed withal.
 He has been acutely nervous
 On seeing you girls sitting together.
 But it is my duty to sing to you the song of praise,
 O Endu Kumang Dara Lempong²
 As that is the tradition
 Which we, Shaman Luong, follow
 When we arrive from our great country,
 At the double bends of a river.
 Who are the persons I wish to invite
 To sit next to you in the line?
 Who are the spirits I shall mention in my song?
 She who sits near you,
 At your right is
 Renggan's and Tutong's³ younger sister,
 Called by the people Endu Dara Lulong,⁴
 A lady who comes from Gelong Batu Benang.

At your left is
 A younger sister of Maga and also a younger sister of Durong⁵
 Who have just arrived
 With torch and lamp early tonight,
 From their great country
 At Letong Jalong Temaga,
 Whose water lies unruffled
 Below the rows of *enteli laki* trees:
 Its headwaters meet and its mouth stands opposite the mouth of a pool
 full of minute ripples.
 That one there is the happy daughter of Bujang Rangkang Kirai⁶
 And the carefully guarded granddaughter of Raja Durong.
 In front of you
 Sits Biku Bunsu Raja Petara⁷,
 Who looks after the whole world of us,
 Below the round dome of the sky.
 Now six of you look so elegant,
 Sitting on the pandanus mats with its *tudong long* pattern.
 You five look very lovely
 Sitting shoulder to shoulder,
 Sitting I compare with
 The top of the *kara nangka* tree which grows downriver,
 Tended by a spirit, Diba Antu Kamba, trimmed by Jimba
 And blown by the strong wind.
 How lovely are you who sit close to one another,
 Like the *sawi* trees growing up and down the river,
 Near the waters of the valley.
 How beautiful are you, Endun Kumang²,
 With your closely draped buns of hair,
 Resembling the top of the huge *tapang* tree
 Which grows at the source of the Rajang River
 And whose top is leaning towards the Badang country
 And bending towards the Uma Lesong Kayans⁸.

Ke lalu ditepan idang madu ranggong,
 Enda kala ngelaung ka bulan,
 Seruran nyelinting kembong,
 Endor orang ngulor rintong,
 Pangka bara sempun engkajang.
 Kasih lupu tudah aku,
 Enda nemu ngadu ka perambu jako beritong,
 Laban lambu aku enda nemu bejako,
 Ngelulu ka nuan enggau serengu tengkurong rekong.
 Tang kati ko randa aku enda nyema,
 Ka kita enggau jangka tengkurong idong.
 Enti sema tu gawai Beragai,
 Rindu ka tangkai isang sagupong,
 Enggau gawai Bujang Aki Lang Sengalang Burong,
 Ke gaga ria ringu ati,
 Mela igi begemi balang bedabong,
 Nemu ga aku nyema ka salangkoh tuboh lemping,
 Enggau salepi sanggol gantong enggi nuan Endu.
 Disema aku ngagai prau indu barong,
 Enggi Linggir laki Anong,
 Ukai enda luan ka iya nya Tarang apai Dungkong,
 Leboh seduai ka nyerang Badang Batang Mengiong,
 Ukai enda pulai nya kitai sama ninga,
 Berita Linggir laki Anong,
 Seduai Tarang apai Dungkong.
 Anak prau indu barong enggi seduai,
 Tak begamal lepong leppong ba luan ujong julong,
 Di-sangking ka gupong isang kelakuyang.
 Tang kati ko lambu aku ngelulu ka nuan,
 Enggau jako ujong dabong,
 Kati ko randa aku nyema nuan tunga kia,
 Enggai ka tak salah sangka.
 Didinga kitai ke betunga mairoh betugong.
 Tang tu ga ukai gawai Beragai seduai Ketupong,
 Tu ga gawai gaga Raja Simpulang Gana,
 Mela leka padi nibong.
 Tu ga gawai Aji neridi ka sempuli padi rabong.
 Nya alai lengka ka aku tangkal jako nya,
 Laban aku nyau ka ngenang pengawa,
 Sida mengua karong kerubong enggi nuan.
 Terubah tinda iya ke baru nyera,
 Ka nuan di-dada karong jantung.

Ukai enda leboh uman iya ka tetengok ka asam maram sajupong
 Leboh jayak iya tetengok ka jerote asam kundong.
 Leboh lumbi' ke baru nemu diri,
 Ke betuboh bisi berasai ngandong.
 Nya baru gumi iya lalu bepenti,
 Ke mali makai lelabi,
 Ulih nyintak di-buli kaki wong,
 Leboh jamat iya ke bepenti mali nekat ai rarat,
 Mali Nyimpong randau begantong.
 Nyau chukop ngagai delapan ka sambilan bulan nandan kembong,
 Nya baru tinda nuan ada,
 Tak lalu ke-kla nyabak ke-kaung,
 Diterantang ka orang sebang,
 Pangkong ka orang tutong,
 Dia belakang enggi indai nuan endu,
 Rendang-rendang mandang badilang api belembuung.
 Punggong enggi iya dibejong enggau lumpung tekalong pengerang,
 Nuan pen lalu disungga ka sida,
 Dipala dulang midong
 Udah nya lalu dikujok orang nuan endu,
 Enggau pelepok ampang belumpong.
 Iya nyau chukop sabulan udah nandan kena itong.
 Nya baru nuan diadu ka sida mengandai tangkai kerubong,
 Diberi sida mandi ka-ai panchor wong.
 Lalu dipamping ka orang enggau piring sungki tepong,
 Chukop ranggong nadai katimpang.
 Datai di ai lalu di-sampi ka Menani Manang Keliong,
 Lalu dibunch ke orang serenti babi kepong.
 Lalu disandik orang nuan enggau punggang ampang belumpong.
 Dinga tak kaung-kaung pangkong gendang sida ka bujang.
 Nya baru nuan disungga ka orang di ai,
 Ngumbang reni pala wong.
 Dia nuan deh ko jako bisi burong,
 Jeritan Nejampong Bujang Geliga Tandang.

Nya alai lalu dikenang sida iya,
 Enggau aki Balang Saribu.
 Nya alai manah deh ko sida,
 Ngayu ka nuan gayu guru,
 Sereta enggau betuah panggong beruntong.
 Nya alai pulai nya,
 Lalu digaga ka Balu Jantau panggau nuan endu,
 Ke bekubau tuntun panggong.
 Dia nuan lalu digali ka sida iya,
 Di-linti tikai bambai kampong.
 Dia nuan lalu ditelah sida,
 Endu Saripah Dayang Anong,
 Tang bisi ga sida mantah,
 Enggai nyadi dikumbai kitai,
 Endu Saripah Dayang Anong,
 Laban iya ke bini Bah Duli Abang Kichong.
 Orang ke tau ngelumpung tekalong,
 Ke-tak rengong-rengong munyi sengkilong tedong tiang.
 Sapa orang ke patut sabaka nama,
 Enggau gamal iya,
 Pia ko jako sida ke empuru,
 Di-sakayu antu' rumah chundong?
 Ka sabaka enggau iya ga,
 Endu Diu Tiong Menyelong,
 Indu ke diau di kebong langit landong,
 Nya ga bini Sengalang Burong,
 Ke digelar Bujang Aki Lang.
 Keba alai genturan papan timpu,
 Enggi nuan Endu,
 Linggam seram linsu kapu,
 Ke bukir ngambi liku entadu mambong.
 Nya ga dibatan tukang Laut Lundu,
 Orang ke datai ari ujung Tanjong Datu,
 Pengibun indu penyu melepong.

Keba genturan papan pansap,
 Enggi nuan Endu Endat,
 Linggam seram linsu chat,
 Bukir senagir nisik kapiat
 Digaga Bujang Puntang Medang,
 Seduai Bujang Sera Kempat,
 Ke datai ari tanah matah lengkap,
 Tumbuh pun buloh amat,
 Buku sarekat, ruas ka satempap ngujong kudong.
 Genturan papan pelangka,
 Linggam seram linsu jera,
 Digaga Pungga seduai Laja,
 Ke bukir senagir manah baka,
 Ngambi gambar indu baya,
 Betegam moa nyurong ka patong.
 Nya baru tembai nuan pen nyau mansang besai,
 Nyau enda agi begulai enggau sa-mengindai karong kerubong.
 Dia tinda nuan pen nyau dara ga bencong renjong.
 Nya alai tilam pen enggi nuan,
 Nyau nyeruran dilongan kurong kibong,
 Penindok enggi nuan besarok,
 Enggau sepok bunga balong.
 Nya baru berita nuau ka dara,
 Ke nyau sedura jauh ngelambong.
 Nya alai dulu nemu meh bujang sida Paku,
 Nyau betati deke ngintu,
 Nuan diperambu papan gantong.
 Nya alai lalu ninga sida di Batang Kaba,
 Lalu nyuong orang Krian,
 Ngumbang ngagai tiban Pala Wong.
 Lalu bisi ati ngabas meh sida Rimbas,
 Ari Mendas nyuong Rapong,
 Bujang sida ari Awik pan nyau ka malik,
 Ari titik Wong Belawong.
 Bujang sida Layar pan nyau maioh ka ngampar,
 Ninga beriat nuan endu,
 Ari senggai arong Betong.
 Nyadi samoa orang ke kena kejako ka aku tu,
 Nya orang ke pemadu pengrindu,
 Deku ngeregu bunga kapu,
 Ka ngempong bunga belitong,
 Sarang perampang upong balong enggi nuan endu.

Tang siko pen nadai ga sida datai,
 Laban takut ka mengindai,
 Karong kerubong enggi nuan,
 Ke endang bisi orang diati sida tangkai mengadi,
 Ke diambu sida enggau jako dalam kuyu tengkurong rekong.
 Nya alai ko jako sida tangkai mengindai, karong Kerubong nuan endu,
 Disema ka sida ngagai pengawa orang ke kelia,
 Nama enda orang ke repa pah kiba,
 Lindong laban jabong,
 Enda tau ka laki anak kami,
 Pia ko jako sa-mengandai tangkai mengadi nuan.
 Tang kamaiatu agi ga nya ngaku,
 Tang enda berapa ngambu utai ka baka nya agi,
 Tang aku nyema ka laban pengawa kitai Dayak,
 Enda agi baka kelia.
 Kereja kitai ke kamaitu,
 Nyau bisi bida jauh ngelaong.
 Laban menoa kitai udah meredeka,
 Kena pegai perintah Agong,
 Utai ka kena kingat ka sida mengindai tangkai mengimat,
 Nya orang ke landik dipesingan jari empat,
 Bejalai ka pensil ai dawat,
 Ngaga surat ngechap adat,
 Ngingat ka sampekak jako kelaung.
 Orang ke ko ati sida nemu ga kami,
 Pia ko jako sida melanyi bujang melisa.
 Orang ke udah ditandang ka orang besekula,
 Ka Ai-rupa kilah China nengeri Chantong.
 Nya baru tau ka laki nuan.
 Laban medong nuan endang,
 Dikarong Sengalang Burong.
 Digelar bujang Aki Lang
 Nya alai seruran tusah meh ati sida melanyi bujang bungah,
 Ke enda suah ninggal ka seregah rumah landong.
 Nya alai tak malu bujang sida Paku,
 Samoa ke semina nemu nengeri Betong.
 Nya alai tak seruran irau sida melanyi bujang tatau,
 Deka sida ngeregau takut kena tikau,
 Sida mendindai Karong kerubong enggi nuan,
 Nya alai sida tak semina nyema ka selangkoh,
 Tuboh lempung enggi nuan endu,
 Ngagai sumbu lampu begantong,
 Ka taja renjong-renjong,
 Ke sempayong tampak trang.
 Tang agi ga nuan disema ka sida ngagai runggut jabong.
 Lekat diujung sarang pedang.

Nya naka aku ngara nuan ke angkat dara,
 Tindok depelangka papan gantong.
 Nya naka aku ngenang nuan Endu Kumang.
 Ke nguang tuboh lempong.
 Nya jako endu adi Durong,
 Seduai Endu Dara Lulong,
 Indu orang di Gelong Batu Benang.
 Nyau madah ka diri penat meh aku dirakat pala patong,
 Udah lama dudok berimbai diruai anchau tikai tudong long.
 Lama kitai udah besendi ka lepi sanggol gantong.
 Kami tu madah ka diri ka pulai,
 Ka menoa raya kami dikebong langit gadong,
 Kena durong sempayong pagar bintang.
 Nya alai jari kiba enggi nuan endu,
 Ditinggal ka adi Raja Maga tandok rusa,
 Digembar iya enggau batu bena,
 Ulih iya ngambi di ai nyambar mangka direba pala apong.
 Nya ga ubat enda menawa,
 Kena muru antu penyakit pada,
 Ngambi ka iya rari balanda,
 Ka-rampa madang mulong.
 Ujong tunjok jari tigai,
 Enggi nuan endu diberi adi Sigai,
 Taring uting lunchik juring babi ngelampai.
 Digembar iya enggau semilu batu pupu ai sungai,
 Nya ubat besai kena kita bumai matak dandang.
 Nya alai ko jako sida:
 Taun ka agi tu badu agi kudi,
 Manah ari taun ke udah,
 Laban kitai tu udah bedenjang,
 Enggau anak bujang lemembang Kuang Kapong.
 Lalu angkat Lulong seduai adi Laja,
 Lalu ninggal ka nuan genselu,
 Batu lua Bunsu Burong Gaga,
 Lalu digembar seduai,
 Enggau pemandang batu bunga.
 Tu ga ubat bisa,
 Di tinggal kami ka nuan,
 Diterima nuan enggau tapa jari dua.
 Ukai enda batu lua bunsu Burong Gaga tu,
 Kena tinda nuan ke bekereja megai ubong.

Lalu disua ka adi Pungga ngagai nuan,
 Batu binka lia jerong,
 Ke diterima nuan enggau tapa ujung kudong,
 Lalu ditinggal ka iya ba nuan endu.
 Nya alai ko jako adi Pungga:
 Ubat tu maich guna besai empa,
 Enti nuan nyau chukop umor ila ngereja pengawa,
 Ngambi ka nuan tau enggau orang,
 Belaba ka ai lia dipala dulang midong.
 Nya alai ubat padi udah chukop kami bagi,
 Nya jako bini Aji seduai bini Raja Durong.
 Ubat pandai pen wai,
 Pia ko jako Jawai seduai Lulong,
 Uдах chukop tinggal ka kitai,
 Kena iya ngaga belulai ampang belumpong.
 Pemandang pen wai,
 Nya jako Jawai seduai Kumang,
 Uдах meh ditinggal ka kitai,
 Batu buah pinang ipong,
 Nya ga pemandang pematak bujang,
 Ngambi ki iya tak kusang di lempuang arong jantung.
 Nya alai tu anang guai nyimpan nuan,
 Api ko jako adi Renggan anang guai nguan,
 Bri nuan soh mengua karong kerubong.
 Semina batu lia enggau batu pinang puda,
 Nya taroh nuan dulu.
 Batu lia tu kena nuan nyemela ka tampok lemba,
 Baka pala impun melepong.
 Tu ga pengarawang ati ngambi nuan mereti,
 Negi ka menyeti bali belumpong.
 Ngambi ka nuan enda malu laban diri sama bla,
 Enti gawa ngereja pua ngaga ubong.

Batu buah pinang ipong tu,
 Baru tau kena nuan gawa besahari sahari,
 Seruran digenggam nuan ditangan ujung kudong.
 Uhay tu ga besai empa,
 Ukai semina tau kena nuan mandang kaban bujang,
 Ngambi ka bisi ngundang nuan disimbang papan simpong.
 Tang lak ka tinda nuan ke beberita jelai ngelambong,
 Ngambi ka jayak nuan tampak,
 Didinga samoa orang ke kena kurong awak Sarawak matong.
 Ngambi ka gumi nuan temu orang nengri,
 Tau enggau orang ngambat bini Menteri Datu Temenggong,
 Ngambi ka medong nuan wai.
 Lebok ka sama dudok bebandong enda lindong alah laban orang.
 Nya baru uman nuan tau tampak enggau orang,
 Nabi Sultan Tuan Insong,
 Nyua ka tapa tangan ujung kudong.
 Tapa kiba enggi nuan endu,
 Nyua ka pua ampang belumpong,
 Ngagai bini Raja Muda,
 Diterima iya enggau tapap jari ngempong.
 Nya ali lalu dibalas iya,
 Enggau gempanang tekang mas chura.
 Jari kanan enggi nuan,
 Lalu disua ka iya berilian intan lama.
 Nya pun nuan lalu disema ka bansa kitai Dayak:
 Nya meh baka orang ke dikarong Endu Dara Lenta, seduai adi Pungga,
 Indu orang ke datai ari Sala Lansau Takang.
 Nyau penat pan kitai Endu Endat,
 Anang ga kitai beguai angkat,
 Laban tadi aku udah ninggal ka kita,
 Ubat jampat batu pukat empelawa ngempang.

Nya alai ubat padi udah ga aku ninggal ka kita tadi,
 Kena kita ke bebuli matak dandang.
 Ubat jadian pen udah aku tinggal ka kita,
 Ke tebekan mali langkang.
 Ubat pandai udah ga aku ninggal ka kita,
 Kena kita megai begajai ampang tengkebang.
 Nya alai tu baru aku betebang batang galau menuong,
 Bayoh ka tuboh minta sabang.
 Sabang ubat padi tadi aku enda minta,
 Laban nuan apin mereti ka jalai bumai.
 Sabang ubat kena gawa aku enda minta wai,
 Laban aku nemu nuan apin kala ngaga pua ampang begajai.
 Sabang batu pinang salaka baru aku minta ngagai nuan endu,
 Laban nya pun nuan dikelala raja bansa Lawai.
 Nya alai ai tuak aku enda minta ari nuan endu,
 Laban iya bisi dipeda aku lalidak tengah ruai.
 Enti penganan enda ga aku minta soh nuan wai,
 Laban iya endang dipeda aku bisi ba chawan indu pinggai.
 Nya alai enti duit aku enda minta soh nuan,
 Laban aku endang bisi meda perenchit ringgit bungai.
 Tang utai ke dipinta aku endu,
 Minta anak pasalin tinchin mas,
 Iya ke alih nuan ngorampas dipintu moa kedai,
 Enti paralin tinchin mata batu, endu,
 Aku enggai empu laban uman nuan apin bisi pebayu sulu ambai.
 Nya alai enti nuan malu nyua ka endu, ditapa jari megai,
 Lak ka iya samepok ninggang mangkok,
 Asoh sametak ninggang chapak ka lidak mangkang kitai.
 Enggai ka anak bujang lemambang Tupai tu,
 Tak lebu karau nyawa nyerita ka tinda nuan ba moa maia gawai.
 Enggai ka tandang anak bujang lemambang Bengkang tu,
 Lebu letak raang ke nenjang nuan, bepangkang duduk berimbai.

Enggai ka anak bujang lemambang Tepong Bulu tu,
Lebu ngelulu ka nuan enggau jako,
Ngumbai nuan pemadu dikerindu ka orang pangkat besai.
Nya alai nuan anang enda mri aku,
Anak pasalin tinchin lumbai,
Tang pia pen jako aku enti nuan nadai,
Tang jangka aku bisi ga nuan utai nya,
Laban tinda nuan endun dara ka sahari-sahari,
Ngereja pra di menoa kitai,
Aku enda enggai ka iya ke mit enda milih pemesai,
Ngambi ka bisi dibai anak bujang lemambang Tupai tu,
Pulai ka menoa raya iya,
Ke di Ensarai Redak Tenchang.

That tree is frequented by the honey bees,
 Whose combs are collected every full moon
 And lowered to the ground with the *rintong* baskets,
 After it has been swept by fire from the *engkajang* torch.
 What a pity that I
 Do not know how to describe your graceful behaviour
 in a becoming manner.
 Because words fail me
 I cannot sufficiently praise you with
 the words I utter:
 Instead I can only compare you
 In an inadequate way with my constant humming.
 If this festival were held by Beragai⁹
 To celebrate his joy with a bunch of *isang* leaves,
 Or if it were the feast of Bujang Aki Singalang Burong,
 Who delights
 To honour the skulls of the enemy,
 Then I should know how to compare your healthy body
 And the bun of your hair, my dear friend,
 To the war boat of Linggir, the husband of Anong,
 And the war boat of Tarang, the father of Dungkong:
 Used by them to attack the Badang of Mengiong river,
 When they return we hear,
 The story of Linggir the husband of Anong,
 And the story of Tarang the father of Dungkong,
 The war boats which belong to them
 Are so elegant at the end of their bowsprits,
 Which are decorated with grand poles of *isang* leaves
 But how can I compare you
 By these unworthy words of mine!
 How can I compare you in that way?
 I am afraid all will be wrong
 and be heard by all who sit here together
 This is not the festival of Beragai and Ketupong¹⁰:
 It is the merry festival of Raja Simpulang Gana,
 And the time to bless the seeds of padi *nibong*.
 This is Aji's¹¹ festival for nourishing the growing padi *rabong*.
 Therefore enough of such words of mine
 Because I now wish to relate the story of
 Your dearest mother¹²,
 At the time when she first conceived you
 Inside her womb close to her heart.

It was at this moment that she was anxious to test the *maram* fruits¹³.
 And when she was longing to eat the sour *kundong* fruits.
 At the time when she had just realized herself
 That you were already in her womb,
 She began to refrain
 From eating turtles,
 Which were caught below the rapids.
 Then also she abstained from making a dam of the flowing water,
 And was also forbidden to slash the hanging creeper.
 Then, when the eighth month had passed and the end of the ninth month
 had arrived
 You were born.
 With a very loud cry
 And a *sebang* drum was beaten
 Together with a *tutong* drum.
 At this time, by the glowing fire on the hearth¹⁴,
 Your mother's waist was wrapped with the *tekalong* dark bandage.
 Then they dipped you inside the deep *midong* trough
 And later you were covered with
 The beautiful blanket of the *ampang belumpong* design.
 When a month had been counted and passed away,
 Your parents prepared everything
 To bathe you ceremoniously below the waterfall¹⁵.
 They made offerings from flour,
 In strict accordance with custom.
 Then when the river was reached
 The Shaman Menani Manang Keliong¹⁶ recited the prayers
 And a pig with severed tusk was killed.
 You were carried inside the *ampang belumpong* blanket
 In a procession made known by the merry sound of the gongs beaten by
 the bachelors.
 Then they dipped you onto the water
 At the head of the waterfall,
 When they said that they heard an omen
 In the call of a Bejampong¹⁷ bird, which is known as
 Bujang Geliga Tandang.

They referred this to the people and
 Especially to grandfather Balang Saribu.
 All pronounced it an excellent omen
 Which foretold a long life for you.
 It also predicted that you would be lucky your whole life through.
 After this ceremony
 Balu Jantau made you a beautiful bedstead,
 As high as one's waist.
 Here they laid you down
 On the *bembai kampung* mat.
 Where they named you
 Endu Saripah Dayang Anong¹⁸.
 Some of them criticised the name and said
 You should not be called
 Endu Saripah Dayang Anong
 As she was the wife of Bah Duli Abang Kichong,
 A man who should chop the *tekalong* tree
 With a sound like the uncoiling of the *tedong tiang* cobra.
 But all who were gathered together
 Inside the long-house
 Said that a person of your status
 Should have the same name as
 Endu Diu Tiong Menyelong,
 Whose beauty resembled yours
 And who lived in the hollow of the wide sky
 And who was the wife of Sengalang Burong,
 Whose surname was Bujang Aki Lang.
 And then the carvings of the sides of your bedstead, dear girl,
 Were all skilfully painted with lime
 In the forms of pictures portraying caterpillars.
 Because they were decorated by the Malay carpenter of Lundu,
 Who had come from the tip of Cape Datu
 And who looked after the floating turtles¹⁹

The smooth planks of your bedstead, Endu Endat,
 Were all painted
 In the form of the scales of the *kepiat* fish
 With paint made by Bujang Puntang Medang²⁰,
 Together with Bujang Sera Kempat,
 Who came from the hollowed ground
 Overgrown by the *amat* bamboo,
 Which had a short joint with a palm wide part between the knots.
 The planks of your beautiful bedstead
 Were richly painted and
 Worked by Pungga and Laja²¹
 With fine carvings,
 In the form of female crocodiles
 Swallowing one another's mouths with legs stretching forward²¹,
 Then, when you were growing up to girlhood,
 You separated yourself from your parents's bed;
 And when you had become a fully grown damsel,
 Your mattress was covered by a beautiful mosquito net and
 Your bed was perfumed
 By the flowers of the *balong*²².
 Then the news of your maturity
 Became known far and wide.
 It was the Paku bachelors
 Who first wanted to become acquainted with you,
 You who slept in your raised bedstead.
 News of you reached the bachelors of Kaba,
 Together with the bachelors from the Krian
 As far up as the head of the rapids.
 Then the Rimbas bachelors wanted to pay you a visit
 Along with the bachelors from Mendas and Rapong.
 Bager to look at you were the bachelors of Awik,
 From the rushing stream of Belawong waterfall.
 The bachelors from the Layar also wanted to pay you a visit
 When news of you spread, my dear,
 As far as that river at Betong.
 All these people I have mentioned
 Are those who would fall in love:
 They would have liked to visit you *kapu*²² flowers
 And wanted to gather your *belitong* ²² flowers.

But none of them really reached you
 As they were afraid of your dearest parents,
 Who had expected some one else
 Whom they mentioned in their conversation.
 Because your parents had said that,
 In accordance with ancient tradition,
 Unless he is a man whose left thigh is darkened by the enemy's hair
 decorating his sword,
 He could not marry their child²³.
 Those were the well known words of your parents;
 But, today, although this was part of their ambition,
 It is really not feasible:
 It is only conjuring up the old traditions of us Dayaks
 And cannot be followed any more.
 Our present way of thinking
 Is now very different.
 Since we have been given independence
 And since we are loyal to our Ruler,
 Your beloved parents think of
 Those who are able to read and write
 With pen and ink
 And of those who are able to draft the law,
 In accordance with the wishes of the people.
 Those whom they think of we know,
 Say the careless bachelors:
 They are those who have been educated overseas
 In Europe beyond the land of China at Shantung.
 He is fit to become your husband,
 You being guarded by Sengalang Burong,
 Whose nickname is Aki Lang.
 This always worries the hearts of the bachelors,
 Who have rarely travelled far from their long-houses.
 The bachelors of the Paku river are ashamed,
 Especially those who have never travelled beyond Betong.
 All the bachelors become worried
 If they pay a visit of courtship:
 They are afraid they
 Will be driven away by your parents with sticks.
 That is the reason why they simply mention your beauty
 And the fairness of your body
 By comparing them to the light of a hanging lamp.

And now I must finish my song of praise,
 O Endu Kumang, whose body is so fair-skinned.
 All these words of mine have come from Durong's²³ younger sister.
 The spirits who come from Gelong Batu Benang.
 But I must tell you that my knees have already become stiff.
 As we have been sitting close to one another on the mat of this verandah
 for so long.
 Long have our buns of hair been close to one another's:
 We tell you we want to return
 To our great country in the hollow of the blue sky,
 Which is fenced about by many a star.
 And so at your left hand, my dear girl,
 Is an antler given by the younger sister of Maga²⁴,
 To which she adds the petrified wave
 Which she picked up from the bore amongst the logs near the nipah palms:
 That is a charm which prevents defects
 And may be used to drive away monkeys,
 So that they run and flee away
 Towards the sago plantation.
 At your third finger tip
 Is something for you given by Sigai's younger sister
 It is a sharp pointed tusk of a large pig.
 To it she adds a petrified form of river water,
 Which is an important charm for us to lead in planting padi in a large
 group of padi fields.
 And these are the things the hostesses say:-
 In the years to come there will be no more disaster:
 They will be far better than past years,
 As we have been blessed by the songs of Shaman Kuang Kapong.
 Rise up. Lulong⁴ and Laja's²⁵ younger sister,
 To leave you the precious stone vomited by the Bunsu Burong Gaga bird¹⁷
 To this they add
 The charm of revelation, the stone of flower.²⁶
 Which we leave with you
 And which you receive in your two palms:
 It is no doubt a stone vomited by Bunsu Burong Gaga,
 Which can be used by you to weave your cottons.

Then Pungga's younger sister hands to you
 A huge petrified ginger²⁶,
 Which you receive with the tips of your fingers.
 She leaves it with you, dear girl.
 The young sister of Pungga² says
 This charm can be used for many things and it is very effective
 When you have come of age to do your tasks,
 So that you may participate in
 Measuring the ginger water in the trough made of *midong* wood.
 All the charms for padi we have divided with you,
 Said the wife of Aji'' and the wife of Raja Durong⁵.
 The charms which cause one to be smart²⁷, dear friend,
 Said Jawai and Lulong⁴,
 Have all been left by us,
 So that you may use them to weave the blanket of the *ampang*
belulai bali belumpong pattern.
 The charm of revelation, dear
 Said Jawai and Kumang²,
 We have left also:
 It is the charm which reveals one's beauty to the bachelors,
 So that it worries their hearts.
 But you must not keep it now,
 Says Renggan's young sister, do not keep it as yet,
 Hand it to your mother.
 Only the ginger stone and the petrified young areca nut²⁸
 Should be kept by you.
 This ginger stone is for you to measure the cutting of *lemba* leaves,
 Which look like the heads of the floating *impun* fish.
 This is the opener of your heart to better understanding,
 When you prepare cottons for your *bali belumpong* blanket.
 So that you shall not be ashamed by your friends
 While you are working on your cottons.

That stone of *pinang ipong* nut
 Can be used by you while doing your daily work:
 It should be gripped by the ends of your fingers.
 This charm's effect is so great that
 It may not only be used by you to make friends with bachelors
 So that they will visit you at your bed²⁹,
 But also it has the power to make you become famous far and wide,
 So that you will be very well-known
 And be heard by those who live in the shallow Sarawak river:
 So that you may become acquainted with the people in the town
 And chosen to take part in welcoming the wife of Datu Temenggong.
 So that your meekness, dear,
 When you are sitting together with others, and your beauty cannot
 be hidden.
 Then you can become famous
 While shaking hands with Tuan Insong,
 When you place your hand in his.
 Your left palm, dear,
 Will offer your blanket of *ampang belumpong* design
 To the wife of Raja Muda³⁰.
 She will receive it with readiness
 In exchange
 For a coloured lump of gold;
 And to your right hand
 She will hand an old brilliant diamond.
 From this time on your name will be mentioned by us of the Dayak race as
 an example:
 That is how a person is looked after by Endu Dara Lenta and Pungga's
 younger sister,
 The women who come from Sala Lansau Takang.
 Although we have become stiff and tired, Endu Endat,
 Do not rise up yet,
 Because only now have I left with you
 The charm of the petrified cobweb which causes one of become versatile.

I have also left you with the charm for padi,
 To be used by you to lead the farmers in the large group of padi fields.
 The charm which causes superabundance³¹, I also have left with you,
 So that you will never run out of food.
 The charm which causes one to become smart
 I have left with you,
 For you to handle the unpatterned *begajai ampang tengkebang* blankets.
 Presently I shall fell the trunk of a standing *menuang* tree
 So that I may beg from you a *sabang* fee³².
 A fee for the padi charm I do not beg from you,
 As I know that you still have no knowledge of farming.
 A fee for the charm used by you to work I do not beg
 As I know that you have not as yet done any weaving work for making an
ampang begajai blanket.
 But a fee for an areca-nut charm I beg from you, dear,
 Because, by virtue of it, you will be recognised by the Malay nobles.
 Tuak wine I do not request from you
 Since I notice it is already here in the middle of the verandah.
 Sweet cakes also I do not ask for
 Because I notice they are placed by you on a saucer, the chief of plates.
 Money I do not beg from you
 Because I already see pieces of silver dollars.
 A thing I do ask from you
 Is a plain gold ring
 Which you obtained from a shop.
 But a ring which has a stone, dear,
 I do not want as I know you have no boy friend yet.
 If you feel ashamed to place the plain gold ring in my hand,
 Let it to fall into the bowl
 Or let it fall on a plate near us:
 In order that the Shaman Tupai
 May not become tired relating to you the parables³³ during the feast;
 So that the bachelor, Shaman Bengkang,
 May not be tired for nothing for singing this song to you who sit near
 him;

So that the Shaman Tepong Bulu may not be tired for nothing reciting to
you all these words,
Which say that you will be loved by men of rank.
And so you must give me
A small *lumbai* ring,
Which I fancy you must have
Because, my dear maiden, everyday
You work tapping rubber in this country.
As I do not mind the size, I ask even for a small one,
So this Tupai Shaman can take it with him
And return to his wide country
At Ensarai Redak Tenchang.

NOTES: APPENDIX B

1. Harrisson & Sandin describe the Iban *lemambang* as a "fully initiated shaman" (1966: 70), but this is rather misleading for the *lemambang* is really a "ritual invocation specialist" (Jensen 1974: 59). Accordingly I prefer to follow Sather's example and translate *lemambang* as "bard" (1977a: ix); reserving the term 'shaman' for the office of *manang*, whose duties correspond far more closely with those described by the traditional usage of this term in anthropological literature.
2. Honorific title for women. Kumang is of course the wife of Keling and paragon of female beauty and virtue.
3. Heroes of Panggau Libau.
4. Lulong - second only to Kumang, in importance in the tales of the legendary heroes and their womenfolk. Sometimes described as her sister (Richards 1981: 170).
5. Son of Pulang Gana and great grandson of Raja Durong; in Malay, *durong* means a padi store (Harrisson & Sandin 1966: 260; 271).
6. Rangkang Kirai - this title can be translated as 'Scorched (as if) Dried in the Sun'; possibly a reference to the drying of harvested grain on the verandah of the longhouse prior to storage.
7. Biku Bunsu Raja Petara - another brother of Lang et al, who stands in for the creator deity Raja Petara at festivals, the latter being too busy to attend.
8. Traditional enemies of the Iban.
9. Beragai - one of the omen-birds and a son-in-law of Lang Sengalang Burong. In the following verses the *lemambang* starts off by praising the woman concerned in terms of ages relating to warfare

and headhunting, but then checks himself and then states that this is all wrong for the occasion is an agricultural festival, not a headhunting *gawai*. It would seem that the intention here is to emphasize the idea of women as cultivators by beginning with the inappropriate use of headhunting imagery which is then declared to be unsuitable in the light of the present context of an agricultural *gawai*.

10. Ketupong - another of the omen-birds.
11. Aji - son of Lang, and married to the daughter of Pulang Gana.
12. There now follows a stylized account of selected events in the life of a young woman, from the moment of her conception, through to infancy and childhood, to the time when she reaches maidenhood and starts to sleep alone (young unmarried women often sleep in the rice loft).
13. The verses here refer to the food cravings of expectant mothers and Iban pregnancy prohibitions.
14. During delivery women are placed in a seated position with their backs to a fire, while sometimes they are corseted with bark bandages in order to assist the birth.
15. Another reference to the first ritual bathing of a new born baby (see *nenjang indu dara* n. 5).
16. Manang Keliong - a supernatural shaman.
17. Bejampong - another Iban omen-bird.
18. Honorific Malay title.
19. The turtle (*penyu* or *lelabi*) is often identified with female genitalia (Jensen 1967: 170) and quite possibly has this significance here. While the meat of the turtle is considered to be a delicacy by the Iban, it is forbidden to eat or kill a turtle (or tortoise) when a member of the *bilek*-family is pregnant (Jensen 1967: 170; see also in the above text).
20. Alternative title of the legendary hero Punga.

21. The preoccupation with describing the details of the sleeping arrangement of the young girl can be understood as an implicit reference to the custom of *ngayap* or 'night visiting' (see *nenjang indu dara* n.9). In this light the image of two female crocodiles swallowing one another with legs stretched forward, may, perhaps, be interpreted as an allusion to coitus.
22. Dried blossoms used as love charms (*bunga jayau*) to attract distant lovers (see pp.307-308 for discussion).
23. Only the best men are eligible as suitors: in the past the young man should ideally have taken an enemy head (though this was by no means an absolute stipulation), while in the contemporary situation he should be literate and well educated.
24. *Maga* - son-in-law of *Pulang Gana*. In the following section, the woman is described as being presented with various magical charms, beginning with those that are to assist her in the cultivation.
25. *Batu Bunga* - petrified flower (charm) to be used for weaving.
26. *Batu bingka lia* - a charm for dying cloth.
27. 'Smart' - *pandai* - when used in praise of a woman this term is usually understood to refer to her skill at weaving.
28. Another love charm - lit. 'the petrified edible fruit of the *pinang* palm'.
29. Another reference to the custom of *ngayap* or night visiting.
30. *Raja Muda* - heir apparent to the dynasty of 'White Rajas'.
31. *Ubat jedian* (see p.301 ff).
32. The *lemambang* now asks for a small fee for his services in performing the praise song.
33. Parables - *karau nyawa* - lit. 'twilight speech', ie words whose meaning is not entirely clear at first sight.

APPENDIX C: Headhunting allegory

The material that is presented here is taken from Sandin's transcription and translation of the chants accompanying a *gawai burong* or 'bird' headhunting festival (1977: 167-177). The particular section that we are concerned with in this instance begins with a description of the forging of weapons for a war party and then leads into an allegorical account of warfare and headhunting, which are portrayed in terms of images that are drawn from the domain of Iban rice farming.

Ngamboh (Forging the war knives of the hosts)

*Nya baru jayoh-jayoh betebang ipoh,
 Nyadoh kitai betuboh deka ngamboh.
 Sapa tuai tau diasoh ngamboh?
 Uji aku, ko Manggang bujang bebulu ati!
 Uji aku, ko Antu Inu Setuak Tuwi!*

*Sapa kitai tau muput?
 Uji aku, ko Minggan,
 Datai ari engkeleman bulan perenching!
 Uji aku, ko Minggat,
 Datai ari kilat jampat menyeling kuning.*

*Sapa kitai tau nyepoh?
 Uji aku, ko Antu Tinggi,
 Ke mengeli gasang-gasang!
 Uji aku, ko Baketan Tunggal,
 Tujuh jengkal ruang belakang!*

*Nama utai ka puputan kitai?
 Uji luntang ka sida,
 Di Batang Langgai Kayan.*

*Nama utai ka teledok kitai?
 Uji ambi ka keruntok lama jeman!*

*Nama utai ka lelabu kitai?
 Uji ambi ka gulok buok buban!*

*Nama utai ka siong kitai?
 Uji ambi tulang rekong kaban Kejaman!*

*Nama utai ka sepit api kitai!
 Uji ambi ka jari tampong lengan!*

*Nama utai ka tempaan kitai?
 Uji ambi ka paah tampong pelapetan!*

*Nama utai ka tukul kitai?
 Uji ambi ka siku tampong dekuan!*

*Nama utai ka dulang kitai?
 Uji ambi ka perut raya lama jeman!*

*Nama uta: ka ai kitai?
 Uji panjang ka darah anak Punan!*

*Nama utai ka arang kitai?
 Uji ambi ka mata anak Baketan'.*

Nya baru udah sedia perangka puputan,
Nya baru penyadi ka api puting lumutan.

Nya baru Minggan muput,
Datai ari engkelaman bulau perenching.

Nya baru Minggat muput,
Datai ari kilat jampat menyeling kuning.

Peda tak kesut-kesut ngasoh api padam,
Lapa asap tak enda melap nudong pupatan?

Uji ganti orang ke muput!
Lalu angkat antu chungkir kaki mesai letan,
Angkat antu tinggi ke mengeli, Girau-Gerawan.

Nya baru nyirap batu kulat,
Ulih sirap sadaun chapan.

Lalu jamah iya batu getah,
Ulih nyamah di lampong pingan

Nya baru menyadi api mau dram-dram,
Lalu puput lengka enggi antu chungkir kaki,
Munyi pama ngalum kerangan.

Nya baru iya muput banti-anti,
Munyi memadi mesan ka ujan.

Peda tak chinang besi undang, Melakang ketam!

Peda tak nelesak besi lambak,
Baka tambak bunga tanam!

Peda tak bebungai besi bilai,
Lalu terebai kiba kanan!

Nya baru naanggong besi andong,
Baka ke nanggong adong anak ikan,
Lalu dilempaika atas tempaan!

Nya baru tenchang tatok iya,
Munyi tebok belatok nerantang daan.

Lalu tenchang nunda raja dagang,
Ke nenchang punggung puting beritan.

Sakali mibit tetarit mesai chapan,
Sakali matak peda tebatak manjai lengan.

Lalu merenchit besi suit,
Ngarampit Ukit kaban Funan.

Lalu merenchit besi lungga,
Kena Kayan uma Nyipa parai danjan.

Lapa kamboh nuan tak enda manah,
Lapa kamboh nuan semina ngudah?

Uji tibar ka dalam dulang,
Ko antu chungkir kaki mesai letan

Nya baru terbang batang enselua muda,
Uji nyadoh nuan betuboh belator ngama.

Lalu gama tetamu ka geraji,
Kena anak mensia ngeripit saap moa basong.

Digama baru nemu lungga,
Kena anak mensia ngerasa lubang idong.

Nya baru tetegu ka duku besimpong ujong,
Nya baru nemu duku naban ka jabong,
Nya baru nemu panyun puting beliong.

Nya baru ruyah-ruyah betebang birah,
Badu kitai ngamboh,
Nyadoh ka tuboh belaboh ngansah.

Ansah sudu depegu sampai ka rekong,
Ansah di paah tampong ka punggung.

Nya baru jayoh-jayoh betebang ipoh,
Nyadoh ka tuboh berengkah nyepoh,

Lalu sepo sayat di urat nyerenang gadong.
Lalu sepo kuning.
Baka siring tangkong burong.
Lalu sepo rendam,
Awak ka tan ngentong di bungkong.

Fell the *ipoh* tree with a loud noise,
We are starting to forge.

Who is the chief who should be asked to forge?
Let me, says Manggang, an evil-hearted bachelor!
Let me, says Antu Inu Setuak Tuwi, a demon!

Who among us is able to blow the bellows?
Let me, says Minggan,
Who comes from the bright moonlight!
Let me, says Minggat,
Who comes from the yellow flash of lightning.

Who among us is able to temper the knife?
Let me, says the tall demon,
Whose teeth look frightening!
Let me, says Baketan Tunggal,
Whose back is seven finger spans wide.

What shall we use for the smith's bellows?
Let us kill those
In the upper Kayan River.

What shall we use for the earth's mound that covers the smith's fire?
Let us use an ancient skull!

What shall we use for the piston of the bellows?
Let us use grey hairs.

What shall we use for the pipe that blows the fire?
Let us use the neckbone of the Kejaman people!

What do we use for the tongs?
Let us use a hand and arm!

What shall we use for the anvil?
Let us use a thigh and leg!

What shall we use for the hammer?
Let us use an elbow and wrist!

What shall we use for the trough?
Let us use the belly of an ancient corpse!

What shall we use for water?
Let us pour out the blood of a Punan child!

What shall we use for charcoal?
Let us try the eyeballs of Baketan children!

All the materials for the smith are now completed.
Then the fire at the end of the tinder is lit.

Then Minggan starts to blow the bellows,
He who comes from the bright full moon.

Then Minggat starts to blow the bellows,
He who comes from the flash of the lighting [sic] whose colour turns
to yellow.

Behold they blow so hard that the fire is extinguished.
Why does the smoke refuse to rise up to cover the bellows?

Let us change the man who blows the bellows!
Then up rises a spirit whose legs are small as the *letan* rod
(for weaving).
Then up rises a tall demon with teeth, Girau-Gerawan.

Then they cut the petrified mushroom,
Which can be cut in basketsfull

Then he slashes the petrified latex,
From the trunk of a *pingan* tree.

Then the fire leaps up noisily,
And the tiny-legged spirit stops blowing for a while.
The fire sounds like the noise made by *pama* frogs, dashing against
the pebble beds.

Then he blows the bellows intermittently,
And it sounds like the parrot (*memadi*) who prays for the rain,

Behold the iron is shining red,
Like the back of a cooked crab!

Behold the steel of the *lambak* (knife) is expanding,
Like the growth of a flower!

Then the *bilai* steel shoots out sparks
Which fly left and right!

Then he lifts up the *andong* steel,
As if lifting up the small *adong* fish,
To rest it on the anvil.

Then he taps it with the hammer,
Like the clattering sound made by a woodpecker when pecking holes in
the tree branch.

Then he hammers it like a rich merchant,
Who hammers the stern of his boat.

With one pinch it stretches as wide as a winnowing basket,
With one pull it lengthens as long as from the shoulder to the wrist.

Then the suit steel shoots out sparks,
Which spread to the Ukits, the relatives of the Punans.

Then the knife steel shoots out sparks,
Which strike the Kayan of Uma Nyipa, killing them.

Why is your forge not good,
Why is your forge unsatisfactory?

Throw it (the iron) into the trough,
Says the spirit whose legs are as small as the *letan* rod.

Cut down the trunk of the young *enselua* tree,
Then try to feel inside it with your hands.

Then feel in it with your hands and find a drill,
Used by the sons of man to stitch the inner cover of the *basong* basket.

Then feel in it with your hands again to find a knife,
Used by the sons of man to operate on nostrils (of skulls, to extract
the brain).

Then touch a knife with a pointed end,
Then find a knife with a tuft of hairs,
Then find the tang of an adze.

Then cut down the *birah* tree,
We end our forging works,
And start to sharpen the weapons.

Sharpen them thoroughly from the nape of the neck,
Sharpen from the thigh on to the waist.

Then cut down the *ipoh* tree,
We start to temper the weapons.

Then temper them up and down on the tree root till they turn green,
Then temper them yellow,
Like the edge of a bird's beak.
Then temper them long in the water,
To make them strong against the hard tree knots.

Ngiga tanah: (To look for suitable farming land)

Lalu ngiga tanah Bujang Pedang,
Ke menoa Malaya landai,
Dia iya nemu tanah manah alai bumai,
Ba kepit sungai dua bepampang.
Lalu datai di menoa ulu Bentong,
Dia iya nemu tanah langgong ditampong muang.
Udah meh kitai tu bulih tanah,
Ke manah alai bedandang.

Nya baru taung-taung belumpong nibong,
Nyadoh ka tuboh ngiga tambak burong.

Kitai beburong ka sabut,
Ke luput dini hari,
Kitai beburong ka antu,
Ke nyabak dui-dui.

Kitai beburong ka Belang Pinggang bejuntah daai,
Kitai beburong ka antu tinggi,
Ke mengeli jarang gigi.

Tebang petai di langgai sungai,
Nyadoh kitai betuboh mupok bejalai.

Lalu angkat Bujang Pedang,
Ngerimbabas babas puting munggu.
Lalu terimbabas ka ruai indu,
Ke belanggu tating pending.

Lalu angkat Bujang Pedang,
Nebas babas di tanah emperan,
Lalu terimbabas Kajelu jugam,
Lalu dipadah iya ngagai ambai dalam.
Peda tak anak Kayan,
Ke belengan begelang siring.

Tebang batang kayu gerunggang,
Nyadoh kitai betuboh berengkah nebang.

Lalu angkat Bujang Pendang,
Nebang batang kayu mikai,
Tang tak tetebang ka rumah Kayan Uma Timai.
Tundan tatok enggi iya,
Tau alai tindok dua berimbai.
Tundan para enggi iya,
Masai dampa langkau umai.
Lalu pantap ka iya beliong lajong naka pemesai,
Peda tak lalu rebah batang kayu mikai,
Ninggang seradak punchak lebak ulu sungai,
Naban ka puan jelu besai.
Peda kerigai iya lalu merundai,
Baka suran papan gasing.

Nya baru tebang petai pedalai rambai,
Nyadoh kitai betuboh bebai pulai.

Lama kitai tu udah belanggang ka rebaan,
Uji kita menantu aku saribu ngabas rebaan,
Lalu angkat Ketupong,
Datai iya ba tanah punchak lebak.
Dia iya meda kayu dadak,
Kulit udah tepanchit abis ngelasak,
Baka sida endu dara biak,
Ke tindok jenak lalu telanjai.
Lalu bejali iya ka tanah ngaki bukit,
Meda kayu janit nadai agi kulit,
Baka sida endu dara mit,
Tindok singit galai-galai.

Nya baru tebang petai di langgai sungai,
Nyadoh Ketupong ka tuboh bebai pulai.

Enti rebaan kitai udah mansau,
Ko Aki Lang Singalang Burong.
Tebang bu menalu nusu,
Nyadoh kitai betuboh belaboh nunu.

Lalu angkat Ketupong,
Mai sempun buok galong,
Enggau punggang ampan belumpung,
Lalu penyadi ka iya api di puting ujung tanjong.
Peda asap tak melap nudong kampung.
Batang nyau abis beluntang nadai bepapong,
Peda kelantan nyau baka kaban pipit itong,
Amau burak baka lemak babi kampung,
Tuga nyau baka pala jelu rasong.
Asap ke melap nyau nyerangkap,
Ka menoa China tanah Shantung,
Ke ngasoh sida mati nyerungkong,
Ke bebandong dudok nyeringgang.

Nya baru tebang simun mutung bedaun,
Nyadoh ka tuboh ngeraraibun.

Lalu bejalai Bujang Padang,
Ka tanah matah landai,
Tetemu kaibun jelu besai,
Ke lalu dipadah ka ngagai sulu ati ambai lalai.
Nama nya ukaiibun jelu besai deh ambai wai,
Nama nya begamal baka Sipai,
Ke bebuok panjai merundai nurung kening.

Nya baru tebang lensat merabat di urat,
Nyadoh ka tuboh berengkah nyulap,
Lalu sulap ngena leka mata anak Funan,
Nyulap ngena mata anak Kayan.

Nya baru tebang batang kayu salumbar,
Nyadoh kitai betuboh belaboh nugal.

Lalu angkat Bujang Pedang
ka tanah matah landai,
Dikentudi ka peruji ati ambai lalai iya,
Ke nangkin selok sundang alai.
Peda tak lalu bekuing endu dara kering,
Enggau buling jari megai,
Nanam jeluan padi nubai.
Lalu tambah iya enggau leka mata anak Sipai,
Lak ka iya enda nemu jalai tunga orang.

Nya baru tebang simun mutun bedaun,
Nyadoh kitai betuboh belaboh mantun.

Lalu mantun ba tanah matah landai,
Lalu muai rumput rubai.

Lalu tinggang ngagai Kayan Uma Timai,
Lak ka sida mati di umai luar bedandang.

Nya baru rengkong-rengkong tajai di kampong,
Nyadoh ka tuboh kitai ngemping.

Lalu angkat Aki Lang Singalang Burong,
Ngambi rajut selulut danan kampong,
Lalu ditanchang iya enggau belembang labar ubong,
Nya ngasoh sida di Batang Kayan matong,
Parai kejong mati kangkang.

Lalu bai kitai pulai,
Leka begumba balang bedabong,
Ko Aki Lang Singalang Burong,
Disimpan gantong kitai ba bengkong,
Lak ka berayong atas bedilang.

Enti kitai pulai ngetau tu,
Ko Aki Lang Nyakai,
Leka begumba balang begundai,
Dibai kitai pulai ka peretang rumah panjai,
Lalu digantong baroh pemanggai,
Enggau lalu ditusok melit ruai,
Lak ka merundai kitang-kitang.

(To look for suitable farming land)

Then Bujang Pedang¹ looks for land,
As far as the plain in Malaya,
Where he finds suitable land for farming,
Situated between two rivers.
He comes to the upper Bentong,
Where he finds the flat land next to the marshy ground.
So we have already got the land,
Where we can have our communal farm.

Then cut the *nibong* palms with loud sound,
We are to cut a plant as a symbol of the omen.

We take for omen a *sabut* spirit,
Who faints at dawn,
We take for omen a spirit,
Who weeps loudly.

We take for omen the Belang Pinggang whose forehead is uneven,
We take for omen the tall demon,
Whose teeth are sparse.

Cut down the *petai* tree at the source of the stream,
Let us start to walk.

Then up rises Bujang Pedang
To cut the undergrowth at the edge of a hill,
And strike a female pheasant,
Which wears earrings.

Then up rises Bujang Pedang
To cut the undergrowth on the plain;
He strikes a bear,
Which he mentions to his secret sweetheart,
And behold, it is a Kayan child,
Whose wrist is tattooed with a bangle pattern.

Cut the trunk of a *gerunggang* tree,
Let us all start to fell the trees.

Then up rises Bujang Pedang,
To cut down the *mikai* tree,
Instead, he cuts the posts of the house of the Kayans of Uma Timai.
The chips of his cuttings,
Are so large that two can sleep upon them
The platform where he stands to cut,
Is as big as a temporary farm hut.
He made the cuts with a huge adze,
Behold, the trunk of the *mikai* tree is falling down,
To lie at the head of a valley at the upper stream,
And with it falls a *puan* monkey.
Behold its ribs are broken and dangling,
Like the incised lines of the *gasing* plank.

Cut down the *petai pedalai rambai* tree,
Let us all retrace to the house.

Long have we dried our felled timbers,
Go you thousands of my children-in-law, examine the felled timbers.
Then up rises Ketupong,
When he comes to the end of a valley,
He notices that the *dadak* trees,
Have cast off all their bark,
Like the young damsels,
Who sleep soundly and naked.
He goes on to the lands along the foot of the hill,
And sees that the *janit* trees have no more bark,
Like the small damsels,
Who are lying sleeping on their back.

Cut down the *petai* tree at the source of the stream,
Ketupong starts to return home.

If our felled timbers have been completely dried,
Says Aki Lang Singalang Burong,
Cut the *bu menalu nusu* tree,
We must start to do the burning.

Then up rises Ketupong,
And brings for a torch the curly hair,
With a piece of *ampang belumpong* woven blanket,
Then he lights the fire at the end of a ridge,
Behold the burnt leaves are like a group of *itong* sparrows,
Behold its smoke covers the forests,
The tree trunks are all destroyed and none remain unburnt;
The white ashes are like the fat of the wild boar,
All the stumps look like the heads of *rasong* monkeys.
The smoke spreads to Shantung in China,
And causes the people there to die while squatting,
Opposite each other with hands on hips.

Cut the *simun mutun bedaun* tree,
Then start to give honor to the (*ibun*) half burned creatures.

Then Bujang Pedang walks
To the sloping land,
And finds the corpse of a big animal,
Which he relates to his secret sweetheart.
It is not the corpse of a big animal, dearest sweetheart,
It looks like a Sepoy (a Sikh)
With long hair hanging down its forehead.

Cut the *lensat* tree whose roots cling together,
We start to plant the sacred *nyulap* seeds²,
We plant the eyeballs of the Punan child³,
We plant the eyeballs of the Kayan's children.

Cut the trunk of a *salumbar* tree,
We start planting our rice.

Bujang Pedang rises
And walks towards the sloping ground,
Followed by his dearest sweetheart,
Who carries a *sundang alai* basket.
Behold the strong maiden turns around
And with her hands
She sows the seeds of *nubai* rice,
To which she adds an eyeball of the Sepoy,
So that it cannot see the whereabouts of other people.

Cut down the *simun mutun bedaun* tree,
We must begin to weed.

We weed at the edge of the sloping lands,
And weed the *rubai* grasses.

Throw them at the Kayan of Uma Timai,
So that they die in their big communal farms.

The *tajai* bird shrieks noisily in the forests,
We start to gather the ears of the padi.

Then up rises Aki Lang Singalang Burong,
And fetches a *rajut* charm⁴ made from the fibre of forest *danan* cane,
Which he binds with coloured cottong threads,
To cause those at shallow Batang Kayan river,
All to die from the severe cold.

Then we bring them back,
The skulls, *leka begumba balang bedabong*,
Says Aki Lang Singalang Burong,
For us to keep and hang from the semi-circular frame,
So that they can shade the hearth below.

If we return from this harvest.
Says Aki Lang Nyakai,
The skulls, *leka begumba balang begundai*,
Will have to be brought back to the longhouse,
And be hung below the shelves,
And also be tied with strings round the verandah.
So that they hang down.

NOTES: Appendix C

1. Sengalang Burong's slave.
2. *Padi sulap* is a small patch of rice planted by the senior woman of the *bilek*-family, alone, a few days before the sowing season begins in earnest (Richards 1981: 354). N.B. the possible significance of this as regards my discussion of the special relationship between women cultivators and their rice crop in chapter 7.
3. Sandin translates the term *anak* in its most literal sense, i.e. as 'child'. *Anak* can also be used, however, to refer collectively to the members of a particular tribe or ethnic grouping - eg: *anak Iban* (Richards 1981: 9) - rather as one might refer to the Children of Israel.
4. Richards translates the term *rajut* as referring to a 'collection of amulets' (1981: 296).

APPENDIX D: *Wa Puji*: In Praise of Heads

The material here is again taken from Sandin's transcription of the chants that accompany a *gawai burong*, or 'bird festival' (1977: 94-101) (see also appendix C). In this section the head trophies that are soon to be claimed by the omen-birds are portrayed as children who wake in fear from terrifying dreams that foretell their death and decapitation. It should be read in conjunction with my discussion of the text in chapter 8 (pp. 369-371).

Bala Ketupong nuntong ba rumah Beduru

*Lengka ka ari nya,
Manggai di menalan Nising.
Meda Engkerasak tak udah dulu.
Jengkak-jengkak di selepak batang tapang.
Peda Kunchit tak udah chegit-chegit,
Nepan disanggit lalau penjuang.
Lalu angkat Ketupong,
Lalu ensurok ka baroh rumah,
Lalu nyandih Ketupong ba sukong bandong tiang.
Kunding lalu nyangking bediri atas gelanggang.
Lalu bejako Nising,
Kati ko enggau anak tua,
Ke nyabak minta perindang?
Kati ko enggau anak indu tua,
Ke bejako sinu ngenang?
Enti munyi nya lenga-lenga anak puna,
Ngua amba taribu tengang,
Enti munyi nya berua nuan orang tuai,
Ngading betimang.*

A party led by Ketupong reaches Beduru's house

Leave that place,
 Come to Nising's house's clearing,
 Where Engkerasak' has taken the lead,
 Standing arrogantly between the trunks of the *tapang* trees.
 Kunchit² also has been standing,
 On a rail of the house ladder.
 Ketupong arises,
 And walks below the floor of the house,
 Leaning against the house supports.
 Kunding³ comes and stands on the fowl's roosts.
 Then speaks Nising,
 What should we do with our children,
 Who weep and beg to be looked after?
 What should we do with our daughters,
 Who speak so lovingly?
 If it is so the young pigeon chirps,
 Praising the noose of a *raribu tengang* trap.
 If it is so, you do the swinging, old man,
 While you sing the songs of praise.

Wa puji

Lalu angkat Endu Dara Sunta-Unta,
 Besanggol laing, Angkat Engu Dara Sati-Ati,
 Bekaki Kuning.
 Lalu pasok ka iya kain empili,
 Ke siti nakang rambai.
 Lalu tempap indai ingat,
 Selingap tisau rawai.
 Lalu peling ka dara kering,
 Sengkiling ringgit bungai.
 Lalu ara ka endu dara nganta,
 Pasa gelang alai.
 Lalu dilepi ka ibu de sakali sanggol silai.
 Lalu disekang indai orang,
 Enggau takang rajang merundai.
 Lalu entak ka iya tisir tinggi,
 Baka jereki tiang jeremai.
 Lalu adu ka ibu gayu dimbu,
 Map tusu nudong rawai.
 Lalu palit ka iya mimit jayau pugai.
 Udah nya becheremin iya,
 Di gulin burit pinggai,
 Nyeremin moa tampak,
 Ke berak-berak baka senayak bulan mingkai.
 Nyeremin tusu madu ke rerimpu,
 Diberi antu Bunsu Salampandai.
 Nya baru iya mantai ka,
 Bungkus saratus bali balulai,
 Lalu digenggam endu dara ganggam,
 Enggau tangan jari megai.
 Lalu pansut iya ka ruai besai,
 Ngebu ka pintu bandir mikai.
 Nya baru tak tenjan-tenjan kaki kanan,
 Enggi endu dara ganggam,
 Ngindik tempuan nyapan,
 Kelalin anggam nguku tupai.
 Nya baru iya meraka temetong,
 Ka beranggong mua pemanjai.
 Nya baru iya meda tali wa,
 Tak kunda-kunda diunda puting pemanggai,
 Meda tali lampit ke bepeit mua pemesai.
 Lalu berua endu dara nganta,
 Diunda puting pemanggai.
 Lalu betimang indai orang,
 Nebah penyambang dabong landai.
 Lalu bekalulu ibu endu,
 Enggau jako nyampau dirintai.
 Nya baru tak serintak nyabak kangai-kangai,
 Leka begumba balang begundai,
 Enggau telinsu langgu nyior tuai.
 O nama mimpi kita deh anak kami,
 Ke tedani tindak tuai?

Nama igau kita deh salantang anak wai?
 Bisi meh kami mimpi lantang indai.
 Asai ka mekong adong,
 Kami indai di langgai sungai,
 Asai ka manchak juak,
 Kami indai ke beserak pemaioh utai.
 Asai ka ngelumu ka kejatu rian belansai,
 Asai ka nyipat lengain lebat,
 Ke bebuah raat mansau ngererai.
 Asai ka bemimpi nyengkau,
 Buah sibau mansau merundai.
 Kati ko asai mimpi kami nya indai,
 Kati nya ngasoh kami raja,
 Nguan menoa baroh peranama bulan mingkai,
 Sakali ka iya ngasoh kami lesi,
 Ke bebadi laya sulai?
 Kati agi bisi mimpi udah nya, Nuan salantang anak andai
 Agi ga indai kami bisi mimpi nyelai asai.
 Mimpi kena tiup selulut ribut ngesai,
 Mimpi kena tinggang telian leka ujan,
 Ke nelian laboh beka-berai.
 Mimpi asai ke kena balut singut champor engkerawai.
 Mimpi kena tinggang batang tapang kami indai,
 Selundang luntang nadai bepegai,
 Tang agi ga kami tau nyingkang angkat bejalai.
 Ngagai seradak lebak ulu sungai.
 Dia kami ke bemimpi pantok pesilar ular bungai,
 Asai ka kena kerigai pegari lempuang.
 Kati ko asai mimpi kami nya indai,
 Nya meh naka mimpi kami,
 Ke tedani tindok lemai.
 O mimpi kita nya lantang anak andai,
 Enda berapa manah.
 Nya ga ngayu ka kita salantang anak,
 Badu agi enggau ngelumu.
 Ka sida ke indu di jelemu rampang bungai.
 Nya ga ngayu ka kita anak,
 Badu agi ngerak sida dara biak,
 Ke tindok jenak mun lemai.
 Nya ga naka gumi kata anak kami agi,
 Nyepu keledi buloh kirai.
 Nya naka jamat kita bujang sigat,
 Agi nempap engkerebap nyior tuai.
 Kada enda nya naka randa kita bujang bula,
 Agi begulai enggau mengua tangkai mengandai,
 Nya naka lumbi kita bujang tinggi,
 Agi begulai enggau menyadi apin besai.
 Nya ga naka jamit kita bujang mit,
 Agi enggau kami nengkadah jerit langit landai.
 Nya ga naka tandang kita dom bujang,
 Agi enggau kami nengkadah petakang bintang tigai.
 Nya naka gasan kita bujang ganggam,
 Agi enggau kami nengkadah engkeleman bulan mingkai.
 Laban nyawa kita udah kena ketak Petara enda panjai.

Laban antu nadai agi ngintu kita di seregu rau rangkai.
Nya alai kita ke bemimpi kena tiup ka selulut ribut ngesai,
Nya ga ngayu ka orang maioh datai.
Kita ke bemimpi kena tinggang telian leka ujan laboh beka-berai.
Nya ngayu ka leka bedil ensengai.
Kita ke bemimpi balut singut indu engkerawai,
Ngayu ka murun unggun bedilang ruai.
Kita ke bemimpi kena tinggang,
Batang tapang ke salundang luntang nadai bepegai,
Ngayu ka perapang pedang panjai.
Kita ke bemimpi kena pantok,
Anak pesilar ular bungai,
Deh salantang anak tuai,
Nya ga ngayu ka kelamayang sangkoh gansai,
Enggi Ketupong seduai Beragai,
Menantu tuai Aki Lang Menaul Nyakai,
Orang ke ngembuan batu ratai,
Ka pemandak jalai pengelempong tulang.

Song of Praise

Rise up maiden Sunta-Unta,
 With her hair in crisscross style.
 Rise up maiden Sati-Ati,
 Whose legs are yellow,
 She is dressed in *empili* pattern cloth,
 Like the stalk of a *rambai* fern.
 The mother of a handsome bachelor,
 Adjusts the corner of her corset.
 The strong damsel swings⁴,
 The string of dollar coins.
 The love-sick damsel,
 Then arranges all her bracelets.
 The dear aunt loops her hair in a sideways style.
 The mother of one supports it,
 With the long stalk of a *rajang* orchid.
 She puts on her tall comb,
 Like the sticks which fence the *jeremai* fish trap.
 The healthy mother puts on her scarf,
 To cover her breasts and corset.
 She smears herself with a little *pugai* love charm.
 Afterwards she admires herself in the mirror,
 On the back of a bowl,
 Seeing her bright face,
 Which is as beautiful as the glory of the full moon.
 To see her sweet breasts,
 Given her by Selampandai⁵ the creator.
 Then she takes out,
 A bundle of her full-sized *bali balulai* woven blankets,
 The mother of a strong damsel grips,
 One with her hand.
 She then goes out to the wide verandah,
 And opens its doors, made of the buttress of *mikai* wood.
 Then the right leg,
 Of the strong maiden,
 Steps on the wide *tempuan* passage,
 Whose floors are fastened with the interlaced pattern *kuku tupai*;
 Then she crosses the *temetong* beams,
 Which are long and placed one upon the other.
 Then she beholds the rope of the swing,
 Hanging down from the end of a shelf,
 She also sees the long braided rope.
 Then the love-sick damsel starts to swing,
 Sitting on the hanging rope at the end of the shelf,
 When the mother of one sings,
 Soft and low,
 The dear aunt of a maiden starts,
 To speak with numerous words.
 They they weep sobbingly,
 The seeds of *balang begundai* (skulls),
 Oh what your dreams, ye children of ours,
 And also the young fruits of old coconut (skulls),

As you wake up from your deep sleep?
 What are your visions, ye who are our children?
 We have dreams, dear happy mother,
 We feel as if we are catching the *adong* fish,
 Dearest mother of ours, at the upper river;
 As if we are spearing the *juak* fish,
 Dear mother, which are so numerous;
 As if we gather together the durian *belansai* fruits.
 We feel that we are collecting the numerous fruits of the *lengain* tree,
 Which bears abundant ripe fruits.
 We dream that we are picking,
 The ripe hanging *sibau* fruits,
 How do you feel, mother, about the interpretation of our dreams?
 Will they cause us to become rich,
 While living on earth below the light of the full moon?
 Or will they cause us to die,
 A death by accident?
 Are there any more dreams after these,
 Ye happy children of mine?
 Yes, mother, we have more strange dreams.
 We dreamed that we were blown by the strong wind,
 We dreamed that rain drops fell on us,
 Which fall so rarely,
 We dreamed that we were swarmed upon by the bees,
 Mingling with the *engkerawai* (wasps)⁶.
 We dreamed that the *tapang* tree trunk fell on us, mother,
 And was broken onto [Sic] many pieces.
 But still we can move our legs and walk away,
 Toward the valley at the upper stream,
 Where we dreamed that we were bitten by the *ular bungai* snakes,
 So deeply on our ribs that our lungs showed through.
 How do you feel about those dreams of ours, mother?
 They are the only dreams we had,
 Before we woke up from our evening sleep.
 Your dream, my dear child, is not so good.
 They foretell that you my happy child,
 Will no longer covet,
 The girls who sleep on their bedstead.
 They foretell that you, dear child,
 Will no longer wake up the young maidens,
 Who sleep soundly in the early night.
 They foretell the end of your days,
 When you have blown music from your *engkerurai* pipes,
 They foretell you, you handsome bachelor,
 The end of your time of striking the musical strings of your *engkerabap*
 guitar.
 Perhaps, that will be the last day of your lives, you deceiving bachelors.
 Only up to that time, you tall bachelors,
 Will you live together with your younger brothers;
 And only up to that time will you, small bachelors,
 Be able with us to look up towards the wide heavens.
 That will be the last time for you, happy bachelors,
 To look upward and see the three stars.
 Only up to that time, ye stout bachelors,

Will ye with us look up to see the full moon.
Because your life has been shortened by the gods,
Because the spirits are no longer looking after you,
Therefore when you dreamed that you were blown by the strong wind,
It foretells that a lot of people will come.
And when you dreamed that the drops of rain fell upon you,
It foretells the shots from a cannon,
When you dreamed you were swarmed at by bees and *engkerawai* wasps.
It foretells sparks of fire from the hearth of *tapang* tree-trunk,
The indication of long swords.
Your dream of being bitten by the *ular bungai* snakes,
Was to indicate the shadow of spears,
Which belong to Ketupong and Beragai,
The senior sons-in-law of Aki lang Menaul Nyakai,
One who possesses a petrified bamboo trunk,
Which can shorten the length of the road and cause one to become light
in weight.

Wa empas

Enti aku nyau mari ngua nuan.
 Enggau tempenga dabong landai,
 Nuan aku empas ka lagi.
 Ba idas di tengah ruai.
 Lak ka perut nuan pansut sempepai alai,
 Lak ka bu kang nuan,
 Salundang luntang nadai bepegai,
 Lak ka darah nuan nengkujah,
 Mesai buah kendi Brunai.
 Lak ka pala nuan,
 Tama ringka sega enseluai,
 Lak ka nuan kena japai Beragai,
 Ke ditelah orang Samatai Manang Burong.
 Enti aku nyau mari ngua nuan ila anak,
 Enggau tempenga dabong jarang.
 Enti aku nyau mari ngelulu ka nuan,
 Enggau jako maioh bekenang.
 Nuan ila aku empas ka di tanah kaki tebiang.
 Ba jalai besai ka berintai maioh bemampang,
 Nya baru darah nuan ila,
 Nengkujah mesai buah kendi bebalang.
 Lak ka bu kang nuan salundang luntang,
 Ngambi ka sengkutong perut nuan pansut baka rambut ubong benang.
 Lak ka nuan dijapai Beragai seduai Bujang Geliga Tandang,
 Detelah orang Bujang Sambai Bejampong.

Song of Anger

If I become angry merely to amuse you,
 With the voice from my mouth,
 I will throw you away
 On the *idas* mat at the verandah,
 So that your stomach will gush out.
 And that your body,
 Will be broken into many pieces,
 And your blood will gush out,
 Like water pouring out from the Brunei kettle.
 So that your head
 Will enter into the *sega enseluai* (rattan) basket⁷,
 So that you will be touched by Beragai,
 Who is called by the people Samatai Manang Burong.
 If I become angry to amuse you, dear child,
 With the voice through my sparse teeth,
 If I become angry and sing for you in parables,
 With numerous words,
 I will throw you away to the land at the foot of the steep hill,
 And to the main road of many junctions.
 And then your blood afterwards
 Will gush out as if from the belly of a *bebalang* kettle.
 So that the pieces of your body will lie about,
 And your intestines will come out, like cotton from a spool,
 So that you will be taken away by Beragai and Bujang Geliga Tandeng,
 Known by the people as Bujang Sambai Bejampong.

NOTES: APPENDIX D

1. Engkerasak is a minor omen-bird belonging to the class of Spider-hunters (*Arachnothera* spp.). When it calls near a longhouse it announces the arrival of a visitor (Richards 1981: 84).
2. Kunchit is a general term for small birds (Richards 1981: 171).
3. Kunding is a cricket (unidentified) and another minor omen 'bird' (Richards 1981: 171).
4. Both men and women sit, when singing, in a bark cloth swing suspended from the longhouse rafters (Sandin 1977: 191 n.52).
5. Selampandai - see Index A
6. Sather tells us that *engkerawai* wasps (*Provespa anomola*), although considered to be female, have aggressive male connotations on account of their painful sting (1978b: 321 n). Their habit of posting a single guard at the entrance of their nest, and their formation into a solid swarming mass when disturbed, are cited as ideal models of behaviour for able bodied men, exhibiting both vigilance and steadfast support of the community (ibid).
7. This is a reference to the whicker work containers (*ringka'*) in which head trophies are placed and suspended over the hearth (*bedilang*) outside each *bilek* entrance.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Bijdragen - Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land, en Volkenkunde.
J.M.B.R.A.S. - Journal of the Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the
Royal Asiatic Society.
- J.S.B.R.A.S. - Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic
Society.
- S.M.J. - Sarawak Museum Journal.

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